

THE LATE ANTIQUE “PALACE” IN POLAČE BAY (MLJET) – TETRACHIC “PALACE”?

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Central building of the spacious late antique complex situated in Polače bay on the island of Mljet (Croatia) has been subject of numerous studies. However, none of them offered definite conclusions about the dating of this monumental late antique edifice situated in the midst of an elaborated architectural complex. In this article a new dating and interpretation of the central building of the complex is proposed, based on the formal and historical analysis.

Key words: Late Antique architecture, Polače, Island of Mljet

INTRODUCTION¹

If one would be asked to compile the list of the most significant and representative cultural monuments in Croatia, late antique “luxurious villa” on the island of Mljet, situated in the bay which today bears an indicative name Polače (as a derivative of the word *palatium*), would surely find its place on the list (fig. 1). Next to the Diocletian’s palace in Split, it is the most elaborate and spacious example of late antique profane architecture of the ancient province of Dalmatia (fig. 2). With its broad apsed hall extending 26.5 m in length,

remains of two massive multi-angular towers (diameter is 11.8 m) flanking the main triple doorway, as well as with its sizable lateral rooms, this late antique structure is still preserved to a considerable height, although some of its parts are today hidden by modern additions (fig. 3).² But, as can be observed, this imposing and luxurious structure was just the central part of a large complex which consisted of several other buildings (fig. 4). In its immediate vicinity, just a few tens of meters to the west, a multifoiled building was partially uncovered and documented, together with a fragment of its mosaic pavement. Further to the west we



Fig. 1. Map of southern Dalmatia (Google Earth Pro)



Fig. 2. Remains of the main façade in Polače (photo by T. Turšković)

find at least two structures of which one with pilasters is still preserved almost to the height of the roof. And again, still further to the west, along the coast line, in the deepest point of the Polače bay, scant remains of an older structure were unearthed, possibly parts of an older villa. Moving inland, on the slopes of the hills surrounding the bay, two Christian complexes developed obviously through a somewhat broader span of time and through a couple of phases. The whole complex and the bay were overlooked by a fort situated on the summit of the nearby hill.

Even this shortest possible description presents the complex in the Polače bay as a unique example of late antique architecture on the Dalmatian coast. However, it should be noted that the state of research of late antique villas in Dalmatia makes Polače even more important. Our present insight into the late antique villas in this region, especially in the coastal area of Dalmatia, is quite limited.³ Unlike Dalmatian ancient *villae rusticae* or considerably better explored villas from the neighboring Istria, late antique villas in the coastal region of Dalmatia have never been subject of a systematic research, although the individual structures

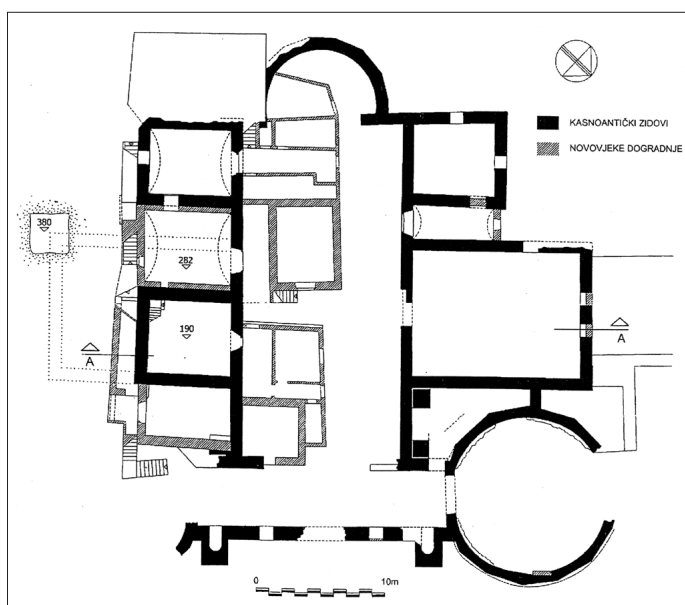


Fig. 3. Plan of the central building (STOŠIĆ et al. 2002)

have received some scholarly attention. Furthermore, although late antique *strata* have been recognized in many earlier ancient *villae* of various kinds, only a few have been systematically explored.⁴

Furthermore, unlike almost all of the neighboring regions of Pannoniae, Moesiae, Histria and Italia, a clear idea about the main phases of development of this kind of architecture in Dalmatia has never been formulated.⁵ So we do not know if Dalmatian elites from the end of the 3rd and early 4th century followed the example of their peers in the neighboring provinces in building luxurious villas. There are many issues that have never been properly explained. For example, did the presence of the emperor Diocletian have the same impact on Dalmatia and its coastal region as the presence of other tetrarchs had on the regions of Moesiae, or as the presence of many emperors of the Illyrian descent of the 3rd

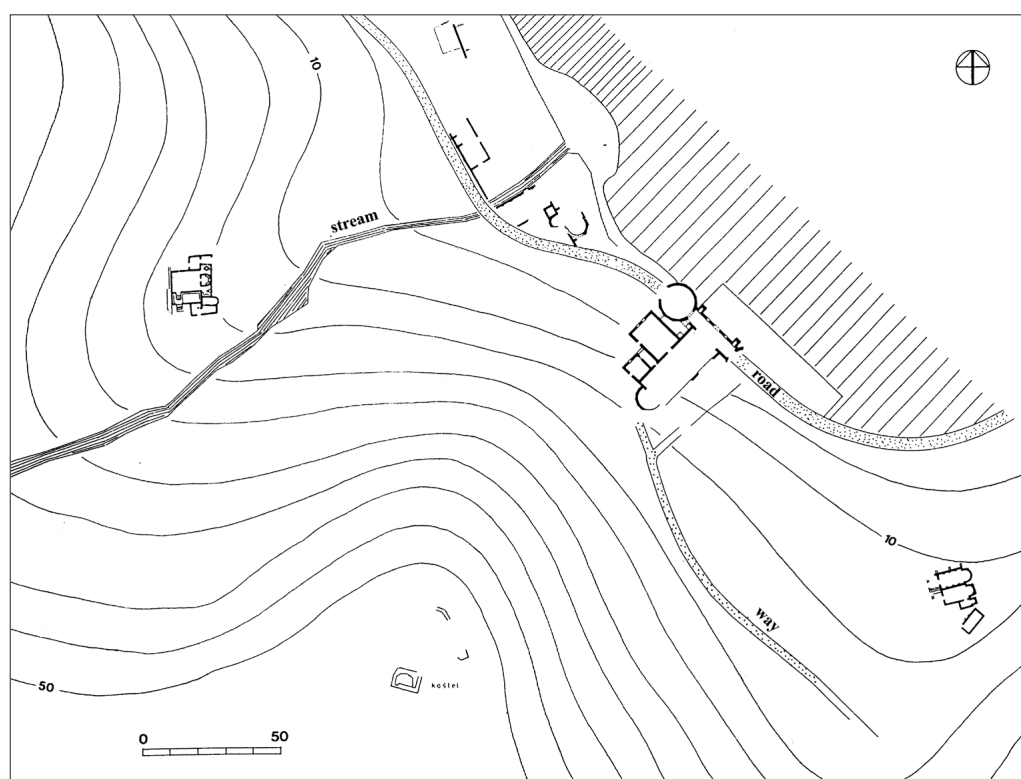


Fig. 4. Plan of the complex in Polače (drawing by TENŠEK, in FISKOVIĆ 1999)

and 4th centuries had on the Pannonian region? We wonder how it is possible that the almost uniform trend of building of luxurious villas have spread all around Europe at more or less the same time, as an effect of social and economic changes which reached their peak with Diocletian's reforms, but it did not affect one of the rich imperial provinces in which the imperial presence was manifested by one of the most representative late antique monuments – Diocletian's palace. Moreover, the province in question was the one in which the imperial possessions were obviously being steadily consolidated and put under the direct imperial control from the beginning of the 3rd century, especially in the ore rich inland.⁶ After all, *Notitia dignitatum* testifies the extent of the imperial and emperor's possessions in Dalmatia at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century.

Little by little, the evidence of transformation of the coastal landscape in the 4th century Dalmatia has been surfacing in the past few decades. New and extremely interesting discoveries of the 4th century villas have been made and in some cases interpretations of archaeological finds, as well as of the articulation of the buildings' plan and elevation, demonstrate that Dalmatia was closely following the trends manifested in the surrounding provinces.⁷ Judging by the finds, Dalmatia was not an architectural *vacuum* in the 4th century when it comes to the villa architecture. Quite the opposite, it could be assumed that it had developed its own preferences during this period under the influence of the Northern provinces, considering the fact that all the mentioned examples seem to be variations of the type of "Porticus villa mit Eckrisaliten", a preferred type in the Northern provinces.

Nowadays the term Dalmatia geographically refers only to the coastal area of the Roman province. But, the studies of the ancient and late antique villa architecture of the Dalmatian inland, which extended far to the north, encompassing almost the whole modern Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and bordering in late antique times with rich and prosperous Pannonian and Moesian provinces, have demonstrated that it was significantly transformed exactly around the turn of the 3rd to the 4th century.⁸ Remains of the villas from the territory of modern day Bosnia and Herzegovina, unmistakably pointing to the beginning of the 4th century as the time of their making, corroborate the hypothesis that the Dalmatian landscape entered the same phase of change in a manner similar to all the other surrounding provinces.⁹

However, there are still further questions. First of all, what happened to the Dalmatian villa architecture in the following period? Was it still occupied during the 5th century? What happened to it with the establishment of Gothic rule in Dalmatia?¹⁰ It appears that the only well documented and understood historical layer along the coast is *stratum Justinianum*, which is, unfortunately, too late to shed some light on the developments discussed here.

Having this in mind, the complex in Polače indeed presents itself as a crucial monument, which could clarify in what way and in what degree the "international" trends in the development of villa architecture manifested themselves along the Dalmatian coast. Fortunately, the state of preservation of this Dalmatian (luxurious) villa allows for the formal analysis of the monument even without the additional archaeological research that would, however, most certainly deepen our insight into the fate of the building.¹¹ What is even more important, in the past two decades the general knowledge of late antique villa architecture and

its development in the Roman west has been significantly widened all around Europe, thus providing for the first time extensive comparative material for the Dalmatian villas. As shown by recent studies, formal analysis is often the only way to determine an approximate date for the structures of this kind and to determine under the influence of which trend they were designed. Regional variations of the standard late antique pattern of villas, which was modified according to the historical circumstances that have swept more or less evenly Western Europe between the 4th and 6th century, should certainly be as well reflected in Dalmatian villas and their design, or otherwise they would represent a unique anomaly.

In a way, interpretations of the complex in Polače, namely its central building, most eloquently present the state of research of late antique villas in Croatia. Most of these interpretations were dominated by preconceptions that were the direct result of an intense preoccupation of the Croatian researchers with comparisons with the Italian late antique architecture, mainly because that was the only material known and available to the Croatian scholarly public. The other aspect of the problem was that the same public was predominantly interested in Justinian's building program on the eastern Adriatic coast, which indeed left a clear mark in the coastal area.¹² However, nowadays we have at our disposal a huge range of comparative material coming from the majority of the western late antique provinces which, at the first glance, having in mind the outlines of Dalmatian villas, show that eastern Adriatic was not excluded from predominant contemporary trends.

THE COMPLEX IN POLAČE – HYPOTHESES

With consideration to these introductory remarks we should turn to the main subject of this article, whose aim is to reexamine one of the most representative late antique buildings (and complexes) on the eastern Adriatic coast.

The reexamination should start with recapitulation of many theories about the date and function of the complex, developed in the past hundred years. If we disregard the late renaissance pseudo historical construction about the *Agessilaus* from Anasarba in Cilicia, exiled to the island of Mljet by Septimius Severus according to the story,¹³ to whom the construction of the "palace" was attributed, first scientific hypotheses appeared by the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁴ F. Bulić was inclined to date the central building into the 2nd century on account of two epigraphic fragments found on Mljet.¹⁵ First morphological and historical examination dedicated to the "palace" was published by K. Prijatelj who, on stylistic grounds, tried to present possible comparative material.¹⁶ Of course, he reached for the nearest available example – Diocletian's palace in Split. On the basis of that comparison, as well as the one with the depictions of villas on the North African mosaics, he came to the conclusion that the "palace" must have been built at the beginning of the 4th century. Soon his hypothesis found an opponent in Lj. Karaman who offered his own morphological analysis.¹⁷ From the modern perspective, although his method was mostly correct, it appears that Karaman did not have at his disposal enough comparative material to reach a convincing conclusion. He held that the features of the structure pointed to the 2nd or 3rd century.¹⁸

About the same time Polače attracted attention of E. Dyggve who documented the "palace's" layout and made the first hypothetical reconstruction of the building (fig.

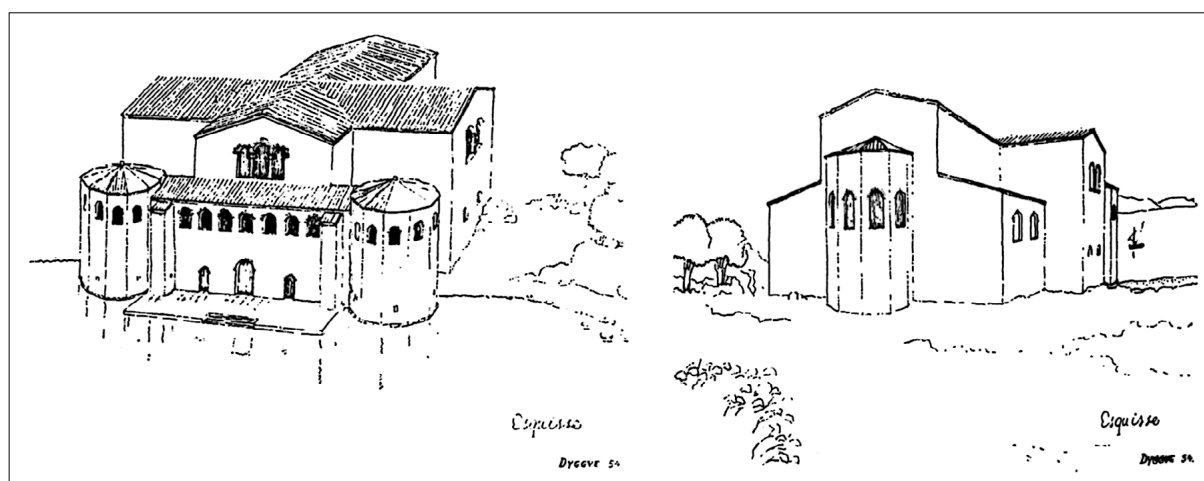


Fig. 5. Dyggve's reconstruction of the main building (DYGGVE 1959)

5).¹⁹ As to the date of the building he relied primarily on the polygonal shape of the apse, which he considered a clear indicator that the model for the building should be looked for in the late 5th or early 6th century Ravenna. The spacious hall of the “palace” reminded him of other famous late antique palatial examples such was the hall of the villa in Piazza Armerina, but even more the reception hall of the “Theodoric’s palace” in Ravenna. However, at that time scholarly public was not yet aware of the fact that the hall in this last mentioned complex was actually not built in Theodoric’s time. Even the reconstruction which Dyggve offered was heavily contaminated with the author’s preconceptions about the development of late antique architecture in the Adriatic basin.²⁰ Symmetrical disposition of lateral rooms that Dyggve imagined, presented as a transept in his reconstruction, lately turned out to be entirely a product of these preconceptions.²¹ The same could be said about his hypothesis that the “palace” could have been built by some Gothic nobleman at the beginning of the 6th century. But, at the same time, Dyggve made several valuable observations that remained unexploited by the later researchers. Namely, he acknowledged many peculiarities of the building technique in which the “palace” was made and concluded that it is most likely that the builders were summoned from some center with a strong tradition of building with tiles. As will be shown, it appears that the assumption was correct, although that centre was not Ravenna, as Dyggve assumed.

But, in the following decades it looked as if Dyggve’s reasoning had in fact been correct. From about the same time Dyggve published his article, the discussion about Polače became dominated by a document composed at the end of the 5th century. The document in question was a donation made by Odoacer to his *comes domesticorum* Pierius, dated March 18th 489 AD. Donation tells us that king Odoacer donated to Pierius additional estates in Sicily obviously with an intention to repay a certain debt.²² Two estates are mentioned as already donated to Pierius. These were *massa Pyramitana* in the vicinity of Syracuse, which was bringing an annual income of 450 *solidi*, and the island of Mljet with a considerable annual income of 200 *solidi*. The profit that the island was able to produce at the end of the 5th century, as well as the imprecise interpretation of the document, created considerable confusion regarding the “palace”, mainly because of M. Cagiano de Azevedo who ventured to create a quite distorted image of *comes* Pierius and to whom he attributed the building of the “palace” as his “hunting lodge”.²³

However, I. Nikolajević was the first to challenge de Azevedo’s dating of the building around the year 489 AD and has demonstrated that most of his speculations should be discarded as mere speculations, based primarily on a vivid imagination.²⁴ She has examined the significance of the donation in a wider chronological context and has pointed out that judging by the amount of *solidi* that the island could have raised annually Mljet must have functioned as a well organized and rich estate before it became Pierius’ compensation. In fact, the estate was obviously given to Pierius precisely because it was already wealthy and well organized. Furthermore, Nikolajević pointed out that another document from the middle of the 6th century shows that the estate on Mljet remained to be wealthy to the same degree till Justinian’s time and was still able to raise the same amount of *solidi*.²⁵ Although Nikolajević did not try to propose any specific date for the building of the “palace”, except stating that it was surely earlier than Pierius’ time, most of her conclusions should be accepted. An epigraphic find strongly corroborates her theories.²⁶

Recently, I. Fisković, the author of the first thorough and comprehensive study of the complex, has accepted Nikolajević’s conclusions, adding that Pierius surely did not enjoy his estates for long since he was killed in the battle on Addua year and a half after the text of the donation was composed.²⁷ Taking into account stylistic features and the fact that the date of the creation of the “palace” should be looked for deeper in the 5th century, he attributed the building of the “palace” to the only likely candidates that held the power in Dalmatia for a certain period of the second half of the 5th century.²⁸ These were the members of the so-called “Dalmatian dynasty”, *comes* Marcellinus and Julius Nepos. Analyzing the whole complex, Fisković came to the conclusion that *comes* Marcellinus could have been the builder of the “palace”, on the account of his wealth and power, and that he was as well the builder of the northern church of the eastern Christian complex, which, in his opinion, functioned as Marcellinus’ palatine church.²⁹ All other churches in the complex were dated by Fisković to the 6th century and he considered them as the offsprings of the affirmation of the Benedictine community on the island.

There have also been some sporadic mentions of the “palace” in Polače in the past decade. Most of them were just mere repetitions of the various existing hypotheses.³⁰ However, one of them is quite innovative and draws attention. This one is based on the comparison between the Episcopal residence in Poreč with the “palace” in Polače and the age old



Fig. 6. Southern wall of the northwestern lateral room (photo by T. Turšković)

misconception related to Pierius.³¹ As will be said, although the “palace” in Polače could have been subject to later rebuilding, possibly exactly at the end of the 5th century, there are no real connections between the original design in Polače and the Episcopal palace in Poreč. Positioning, dimensions and structuring of the halls of the two buildings have nothing in common, and neither do their overall layouts.³² Furthermore, even without a closer examination it is quite obvious that the “palace” in Polače was a building in which the signs of the worldly power were imprinted, which cannot be found on the urban Episcopal residences of the 5th and 6th century.³³ So, it seems that this connection was made more out of the eagerness to find an explanation for the “palace” in Polače than because of the actual similarities between the two structures. Episcopal palace in Poreč should be thus compared with its own kind, like Episcopal residences in Ravenna, Geneva, etc., as well as examined in the light of changes of the urban *domus* happening during the 5th century, and not with the architecture of obviously different kind.

This lengthy recapitulation of the history of research of the “palace” clearly demonstrates how little is actually known about this late antique monument.³⁴ Although many hypotheses and theories have been put forward, little is known for sure. The “palace” and the complex have never been systematically excavated, and neither was the thorough morphological analysis ever done, nor was the “palace” examined in the context of the historical circumstances in the late antique province of Dalmatia.³⁵

In a situation when one such an elaborate monument has been presented by so many diverse and mainly arbitrary interpretations it is not easy to correct all the facts at an instance. Precisely because of this, the following interpretation will be focused on the two issues – morphological analysis of the “palace” and the historical context in which such an edifice could have been built. But, before presenting the interpretation, some objections on the existing theories should be pointed out.

REVISION OF THE EXISTING HYPOTHESES

Starting from the most recent hypotheses, few objections should be put forward against the dating of the central building into the 5th century and relating its creation to the erection of the northern church of the eastern church-complex. First of all, as has been pointed out in recent studies, rule of *comes rei militaris* Marcellinus over Dalmatia was not so



Fig. 7. Lateral wall of the western church (photo by T. Turšković)

straightforward. Although *comes* had a practical rule over the province, formally in his own time Dalmatia was most likely a part of the Eastern Empire. In legal terms, it was neither independent nor Marcellinus', who was after all a military officer.³⁶ Legal status of Dalmatia and its attachment to the Eastern Empire seems in the case of Mljet as a more important fact than the issue of Marcellinus' autonomy. If we consider Mljet as an imperial property (and that conception has been more or less universally accepted) before it passed to the hands of Odoacer, possibly as his regal *patrimonium* that he could donate to his *comes*, then the island could not have been in Marcellinus' possession or exclusively used by him during the 5th century.³⁷ If the island was an imperial or emperor's property then it had to be under the jurisdiction of the imperial administration. Moreover, we know that the imperial administration did not break down during the 5th century, as the *Notitia Dignitatum* best testifies. Good example of what happened when there was tempering with the imperial property is the incident with the theft of the shroud from the Diocletian's tomb, which occurred in 356 AD.³⁸ The wealthy Dalmatian Marcellinus could have only been a *conductor* of the property.³⁹ However, there is no evidence for that either.

Finally, few additional arguments contradicting the possibility that Marcellinus was *maître d'œuvre* of the edifices on Mljet can be put forward. First argument contradicts the possibility that the “palace” and the church were built at the same time. Namely, it is well known that Marcellinus was not a Christian, but was of a firm philosophical orientation, probably Neoplatonistic.⁴⁰ Thus, it is extremely unlikely that he would initiate the building of a church.

Furthermore, one other misconception about Marcellinus has often been repeated.⁴¹ Contrary to this misconception, it should be noted that there is no evidence that Marcellinus had under his command a sizable fleet. Actually, his naval resources were more probably relatively limited.⁴² Thus, it seems highly unlikely that he would position his “palace” on a relatively vulnerable place in the southernmost part of Dalmatia, from which he could hardly reach other crucial points in the province with the appropriate speed.

Secondly, techniques in which the churches and the central building were built are of a completely different kind. Central building, with all its parts, was built in a very distinctive technique, which cannot be easily classified (fig. 6).⁴³ It was consistently used throughout the building, on all of its walls.⁴⁴ On the other hand, both church complexes were built in different techniques. This becomes most evident in the eastern church complex (its northern part), for which it was assumed that it could have been contemporaneous with the central building (fig. 7).⁴⁵ Its walls were built in a



Fig. 8. Lateral wall of the eastern church (photo by T. Turčković)

most irregular manner that cannot be attributed to the same craftsmen who built the central building. On the other hand, southwestern church is again quite a different case (fig. 8). It was built in a technique which resembles the one used in the “palace”. However, size and shape of the stones, as well as the order of thinner strips, are clearly different from the ones in the central building. Still, it reflects a building practice which is attested on the main building on a much larger scale. Thus, it could be assumed that the southwestern church was built while the particular building tradition was still alive on Mljet, while the eastern one was a product of a time when the tradition was lost.

Finally, the main objection to the theory that the “palace” was built in the 5th century is that the acceptance of such a date would make the “palace” an almost unique example of the kind. Building of the “palace” of such proportions and such an elaboration *ex novo* in the 5th century would indeed represent an extraordinary anomaly in the region. The main outlines of the evolution of the villa architecture in the 5th century have been discussed by many researchers in the past few decades. Most of the studies showed that, by the beginning of the 5th century, an important change in the usage of villas happened all around the Roman west.⁴⁶ Of course, process of transformation has started in various regions and areas at a different time, but it seems that the analogies between the regions can be made, from Panonnia to Hispania. It has been almost universally accepted that the main change during the 5th century happened with the most representative parts of villas, foremost with the luxurious reception rooms which gave place, as did the residential parts, to the *pars rustica*. So, except for a few Italian examples, it seems that the 5th century Roman West did not witness the building of completely new aristocratic retreats on such an imposing scale as we find it in Polače - where the second largest reception hall in Dalmatia was built, larger being only the one in Diocletian’s palace. Although there is no evidence that the coastal region of Dalmatia with its islands

shared the fate of other parts of the province and most of the European continent, the description of the coastal part of Dalmatia in the 5th century made by J. J. Wilkes, as a “comparatively tranquil backwater” and “a haven for the refugees of all social levels” fleeing from the north, implies that the overall historical circumstances of the time must have dictated some changes in the province.⁴⁷ In these circumstances it is hard to imagine that such a demanding project would be planned, financed and executed. Furthermore, there is no profane building in Dalmatia of that time with which it could be compared, nor there is any in the 5th century Roman West at all.⁴⁸

Even more unlikely is the possibility that the “palace” was built in the first half of the 6th century, as Dyggve believed. Polygonal shape of the apse was one of Dyggve’s strongest arguments that the “palace” was built under the influence of the Christian architecture of Ravenna and the “Palace of Theodoric”. Indeed, the “palace” on Mljet had a polygonal apse rounded on the inside, just like the late antique churches in Ravenna, but on the outer side it had nine facets, and that is something that cannot be found in Ravenna.⁴⁹ Furthermore, although the comparison with the “Theodoric’s palace” could be accepted in a way, the problem is that we now know that the most representative part of the Ravenna palace was not built in Theodoric’s time.⁵⁰ If we compare the layout of the “palace” on Mljet with the various phases of the development of the reception part of the “Theodoric’s palace” we will find more similarities with the second (4th century) or the third (beginning of the 5th century) phase, than with the fourth phase (end of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th century). Although the way in which lateral rooms communicated with the central hall in the 4th century Ravenna palace (2nd phase) strongly reminds of the way the lateral rooms were connected with the central hall in Polače (where most probably all the lateral rooms were directly connected with the apsidal hall), it should be pointed out that the proportions of the extended hall of the “Theodoric’s palace” from the beginning of the 5th century (3rd phase) were very similar to the one in Polače (fig. 9).⁵¹ Nevertheless, some of the lateral rooms in Ravenna were apparently walled off at the beginning of the 5th century and fell out of use. We still do not know much about the eastern wall of the “palace” in Polače (presently obscured by 19th and 20th century houses which were incorporated in the large hall), but the western one with its extremely large openings clearly demonstrates in which way the main hall in Polače was connected with the lateral rooms.⁵² Furthermore, the fact that the façade of the main building in Polače had nothing in common with the “Theodoric’s palace” should not be overlooked. The model for the façade must have come from somewhere else and was most probably the product of a completely different time. So, except for the building with two apses, probably a triconch *triclinium* that resembles the one in the “Theodoric’s palace”, added in the late 5th or early 6th century, and many other late antique *triclinia*, there is no real reason to suppose that the model for the Polače “palace” was actually the palace in Ravenna.

THE “PALACE” IN POLAČE – A DISPLAY OF POWER

The comparison with the palace in Ravenna clearly indicates that the date of building of the luxurious main building in Polače should be looked for deeper in Late Antiquity. As mentioned, K. Prijatelj has already tried to present the arguments that the “palace” was in a way a morphological

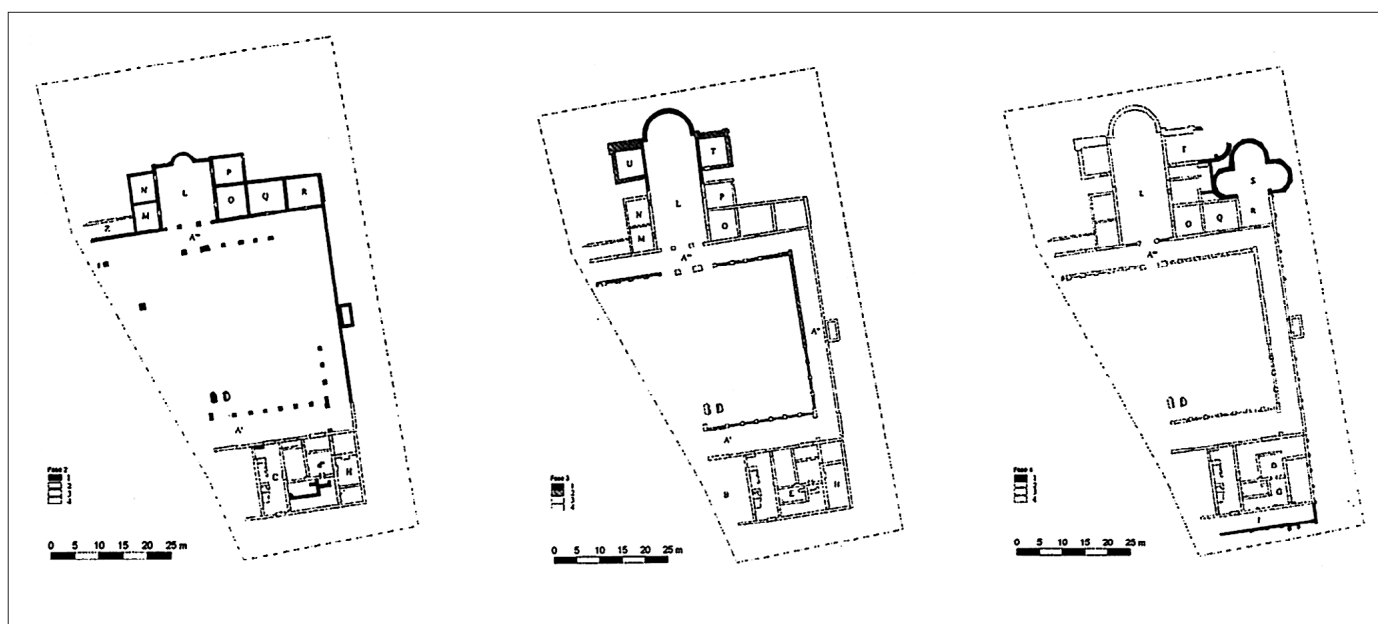


Fig. 9. Three phases of the „Palace of Theodoric“ in Ravenna (A. AUGENTI 2007)

and functional relative of the Diocletian's palace in Split. Although this comparison seems somewhat farfetched at first, because of the obvious differences between the two, it looks like Prijatelj has indeed inadvertently recognized a common feature of these two buildings. However, this was not the polygonal shape of the towers flanking the entrances, nor any other superficial similarity with Diocletian's palace. Common feature lies in essentially the same symbolical and architectural concept which was embedded in both of them. Both buildings clearly represent the type of *architettura di potenza* of the 4th century, as J.-P. Sodini calls it.⁵³ In the case of the imperial palace in Split there is no need for additional explanations, but for the “palace” on Mljet it should be further clarified how it displayed the power of its owner.

Mechanism of display and the creation of an image of power in the case of Polače is much the same as in many other examples of villas and palaces of the 4th century. “Architectural exhibitionism” of the 4th century, to borrow the term from S. Scott, was here reflected in almost all of its features.⁵⁴ We can start with the proportions of the building, which were one of the most obvious elements of grandeur. The fact is that the apsed hall of the “palace” in Polače was the second largest hall of a profane building on the Dalmatian coast, first of course being the main reception hall of Diocletian's palace in Split. The length of the Polače hall of 26.5 m, its width of about 13 m (diameter of the apse 8.3 m) makes it also the second largest in the whole late antique province of Dalmatia. Of course, its measures are modest when compared with the biggest reception halls in the Roman West and with such examples as the palace in Trier, the palace in Savaria, or Cercadilla. But, in the regional context there are only a few larger late antique reception halls. As the statistics, brought by L. Mulvin in her valuable study of late Roman villas in Balkan region, have shown, the only luxurious villas whose halls could have been compared to Polače in a wider Balkan region, prosperous during the second half of the 3rd century and through the most part of the 4th century thanks to the imperial presence and Illyrian birth of many emperors, are those of the palaces and villas at Mediana (I) near Niš, often attributed to the Constantine's imperial family (l=26.5 m), then Hosszuhetény (l=26.5 m), the main apsidal hall in the impressive building complex in Alsóheténypuszta

built in the first decades of the 4th century (45x15 m) and the puzzling building in Kekkut (l=35m).⁵⁵ Thus, it appears that the aula in Polače is one of the largest examples in the whole region.⁵⁶ It was larger than the main reception hall of the imperial palace in Gamzigrad and slightly bigger than the extended hall of the early 5th century “Theodoric's palace”. By its measures, it is almost a rival to the famous late antique villa in Piazza Armerina (30 m).

Again, these proportions are a clear indicator of wealth and social status of its owner and should not be discarded as an irrelevant criterion. If we accept that the size was one of the primary parameters in the display of power, then we naturally come to the conclusion that the “palace” belonged to a wave of construction of extremely sizable and luxurious villas which, following the Diocletian's reform, redefinition of the countryside and the restructuring of the basis of the economic life of the Empire as well as shifts of centers of power, almost simultaneously swept Italy, Spain, and northern Illyricum at the end of the 3rd century, and which lasted for the most part of the 4th century.

TWO-TOWERED MOTIF ON THE FAÇADE

However, in the case of the “palace” in Polače, one of the most instructive parts of the building, pointing to the time of its creation, is its main façade (fig. 10). With its two disproportionately large multi-angular towers flanking the tripartite entrance, above which the gallery extended, it offered a powerful vista to the mariners sailing into the Polače bay.⁵⁷ It seems that the design of the façade was even more powerful than Dyggve imagined when he made his reconstruction (fig. 5).

Architectural motif found on the façade of the “palace” in Polače has been an object of several studies, starting from K. M. Swoboda and E. B. Smith to S. Ćurčić.⁵⁸ It was already Swoboda who recognized its meaning, while Smith thoroughly explored its further connotations in late antique and medieval architecture. On the other hand, Ćurčić pointed out that it was during the age of Tetrarchy that the motif of triumphal city gate began to be associated with imperial palaces, at least on a symbolic level. His examination of the semantic equation between the town and late antique

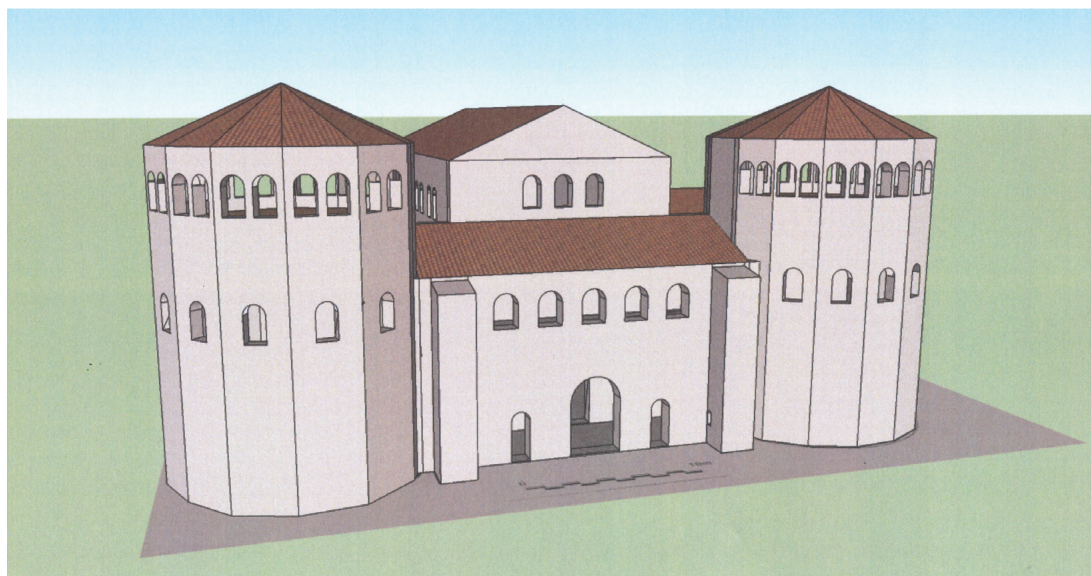


Fig. 10. Hypothetical reconstruction of the central building (TURKOVIĆ)

palaces, as well as of the constitutive architectural elements and motifs of late antique palatine architecture, appears to be mostly correct and convincing. He was certainly right regarding the motif of the imposing city gates flanked by towers, an apparent denominator of the imperial property during the age of Tetrarchy. He was also correct in recognizing the symbolical value of the motif which, as he observed, was present in Polače bay, too.

However, his assumption that this motif was exclusively related to imperial architectural iconography should be complemented with some observations derived from the inspection of the wider range of examples of the luxurious late antique villas and with a more accurate dating of the examples that Čurčić brought in his study.

First of all, as Smith and Swoboda pointed out, the motif was introduced to Roman architectural iconography much earlier than the beginning of the fourth century. Already in Augustus' time it became a sign of a liaison between the civic and the imperial.⁵⁹ Obviously, the semantic equation of villas with the cities introduced this and other related motives into the luxurious residential architecture. As Marzano has pointed out, imitations of city walls with towers appear on several villas in the territory of Cosa.⁶⁰ The most representative is the one in Le Colonne explored by S. L. Dyson who offered a very convincing explanation why a turreted wall was built on a single side of this luxurious villa.⁶¹ As has been noticed, the turreted wall of the villa at Le Colonne obviously imitated the city wall of the nearby Cosa, which also had a single turreted wall oriented towards the sea. In both cases, semantic value of these walls clearly outmatches their almost non-existing defensive potential.

Because of lack of real defensive function of the walls and towers, often positioned only on the side of the main entrance, L. Mulvin has justifiably defined the type of pseudo-fortified villas owned by the rich Pannonian, Dacian, Moesian and Dalmatian *possessores* of the 3rd and 4th century who transformed the rural landscape in these northern provinces as well as the economic basis on which the existence and importance of these provinces relied. In the essence, facades of these villas were nothing more than an elaboration of the age old motif which preserved all of its connotations from the early imperial times till the Dominate.⁶²

Most certainly, the incentive for the appearance of the motif in the architecture of villas in the northern provinces

came from the imperial circle. One of the earliest examples of the introduction of the motif in the region is surely the façade of the main building in the Parndorf complex, with its two semi-circular projections connected with the entrance *porticus*.⁶³ In the case of Parndorf there is no doubt that the projections were a mere indication of the owner's status and the function of the building.⁶⁴ More or less, the same could be said about all the other examples which Mulvin has joined in a type of villa with putative or pseudo fortifications. Mulvin also pointed out that the majority of villas of this type were situated near the towns, major roads, or military camps where there was no real need for additional defense.⁶⁵ At the same time, taking into account their position, there was a need for an additional indication of the owner's status and wealth.⁶⁶

Actually, it seems that all of the mentioned northern villas were built under the direct or indirect influence of the imperial architecture, just as Čurčić concluded. For example, after the thorough study of the fortifications of Diocletian's palace it was concluded that they could not have had actual defensive value.⁶⁷ So, in a sense, Diocletian's palace was also surrounded by putative fortifications which were most probably only a symbolic statement about the character of the building. Unlike somewhat conservative forms of Diocletian's palace, in the imperial architecture of the northern regions, birthplace of the other tetrarchs, another similar type of imperial residence was promulgated. Basically, it also relied on the same motif of city walls and stemmed from the same equation of town and palace, but with a more extravagant elaboration of the perimeter walls. These were the five 4th century examples from the northern *limes* – Gamzigrad, Alsóheténypuszta, Keszthely-Fenékpuszta, Šarkamen and Ságvár-Tricciana. At least two of them were imperial residences.

Galerius' palace *Felix Romuliana*, with its two successively built perimeter walls, is probably the most instructive example when discussing the evolution in the design of the imperial architecture of its time (fig. 11). A resemblance between the earlier fortifications in Gamzigrad and the imperial palaces in Šarkamen and Split has already been noted.⁶⁸ But, the later ones were of a completely new and almost unique design. Twenty disproportionately large towers of the *Romuliana* must have been much more a statement than a result of an increased urgency for defense.⁶⁹ Extreme projection of

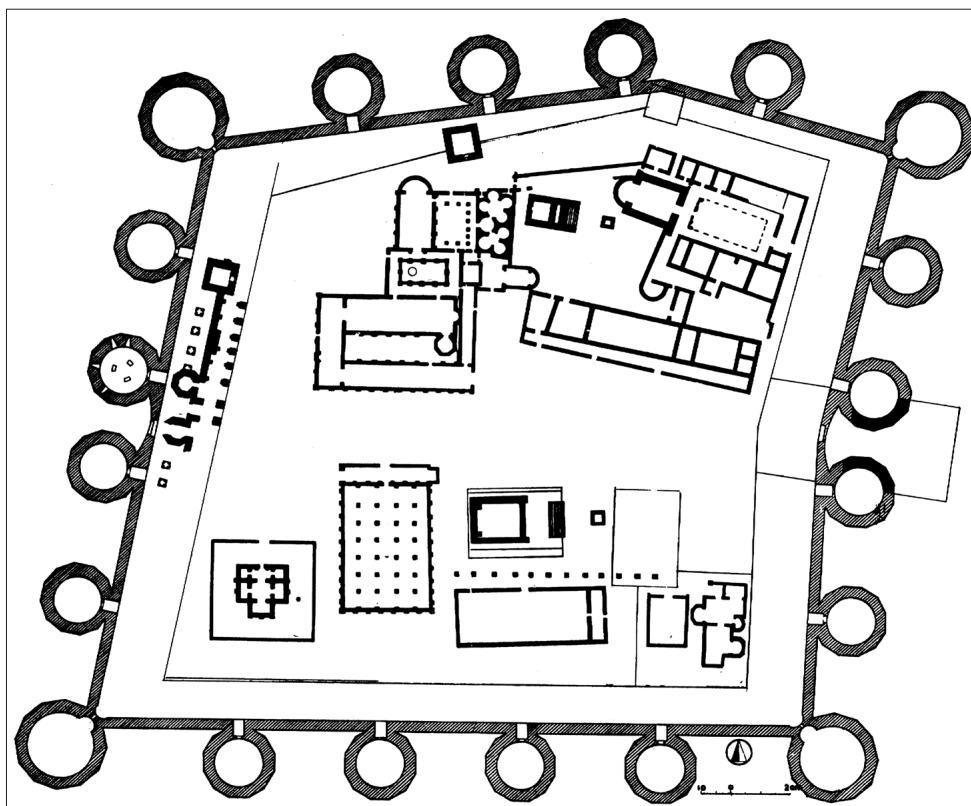


Fig. 11. Plan of Romuliana (SREJOVIĆ, LALOVIĆ 1989)

these towers makes them most likely a model for the creation of the Alsóheténypuszta, Keszthely-Fenékpuszta and Ságvár fortifications. Again, their unusually close positioning surely points to the same architectural as well as the symbolical concept.⁷⁰

Having in mind the deep symbolical roots that the motif of the towered façade had, as have Smith, Swoboda and others pointed out, and considering that the motif was indeed present on most of the imperial palaces by the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 4th century, it is not surprising that it found the way into the architecture of the newly arisen administrative aristocracy. These were not only wealthy landlords of the Danube region who supplied the northern limes and prospering capitals of the northern provinces, but also the aristocracy of the same status in other parts of the Empire. As P. Sarris has called it, this “transimperial elite”, consisting of administrative aristocrats, quickly adopted the architectural motif that could have emphasized their close relations with the imperial court, from which their administrative, economic and judicial power stemmed.⁷¹ Although the reasons for the application of the motif cannot be summed up in just a few sentences, considering the complexity of the issue, it should be noted that the primary reason for the appearance of the motif on villas, such were those in El Val, La Olmeda, Cercadilla or before mentioned Balkan ones, as well as those depicted on the North African mosaics, was to stress the landlords’ complete supremacy over his dominion, which he enjoyed by the grace of the Emperor to whom the main residence of the estate was at a disposal when travelling.⁷²

Considering the frequency with which the two towered facades appeared on the *praetoria* of the wealthy landlords and imperial villas and palaces at the end of the 3rd century, and all through the 4th century, this architectural motif, although frequently missing from luxurious Italian *praetoria*, should be considered as one of the constitutive elements of the palatial architecture of the landowning elites of the first

and most prosperous period of the development of the villa architecture in the western provinces.

As expected, the motif gradually disappeared during the 5th century with the decrease in the construction of new luxurious villas around Europe. There has been some discussion about the 5th century fortified villas in Italy and it was demonstrated that the design of these dwellings still included towers. But, although these villas indeed had towers, their general design had almost nothing in common with the pseudo-fortified façade in Polače. This particular two-towered composition with the multi-angular towers (almost 12 m wide) is something that cannot be compared with any 5th century Italian example. The tower of the villa in San Giovanni di Ruoti is positioned at its rear side, although compared with the towers in Polače, is nothing alike.⁷³ The same could be said of other 5th century villas in Italy, as their towers never formed a motif which we find in the 4th century architecture. So, the comparison between the 5th century Italian villas and a century older Danubian pseudo-fortified ones really seems as farfetched. The only case where we might recognize the same motif is the “Theodoric’s palace” in Galeata, which was obviously the product of a tradition imported by Goths from the northern provinces.⁷⁴

Therefore, it appears that the composition of the façade in Polače speaks loudly against the dating of the building into the 5th century. It cannot be compared to any of the 5th century examples. On the other hand, its original design and a demanding execution clearly points to the 4th century, the age when such constructions had their full meaning and use.

PARTS OF THE CENTRAL BUILDING AND ITS IMMEDIATE VICINITY

As to the possible objection that the “palace” in Polače did not contain the courtyard in front of the hall, which was one of constitutive elements of the 4th century villa architecture, we could point out that Th. Smith made an



Fig. 12. Hypothetical reconstruction of the villa in El Val

interesting observation about the way in which the seats of lordship were structured. He pointed out that the primary function of the apsidal hall can be deduced from the way it was entered. Easy and direct entrance into the apsidal hall, according to Smith, denotes its public and judicial function, unlike the reception and dining rooms which were preceded with atria and integrated with other private spaces.⁷⁵ That is precisely what we find on Mljet, where the large apsidal hall was entered directly through an entrance *porticus* without an intermediary courtyard that would separate them. But, the way in which the central building in Polače was structured is by no means a unique case. Let us remember the way in which the building of the same function in El Val was structured. As in the case of the building on Mljet, the apsidal hall in El Val was entered from the north directly through the entrance *porticus* flanked, as on Mljet, by two sizable towers (fig. 12).⁷⁶ Furthermore, the same disposition in a more modest form can be found on the functionally identical objects in Budakalsz and Majdan. Of course, these structures look like abbreviations of the usual 4th century tripartite planimetric division arranged along an axis, which included peristyle or courtyard separating the reception hall from the entrance and providing the entrance to the guest rooms and various other spaces. In the case of Mljet, we can also speculate that the courtyard is missing because of the shape of the surrounding terrain and the slopes of the hill rising from the coast line. All these factors must have conditioned the compact plan of the building (fig. 4).

Following the logic of J. T. Smith it should be concluded that the central building in Polače obviously had a purely public purpose. As it was orientated towards the sea and, judging by the abundance of the underwater archaeological finds in the Polače bay, towards a busy harbor, it could have only served as an audience room for the reception of visitors to the Polače bay.⁷⁷ Its dimensions, the grandeur and the overt expression of wealth and power of the owner makes it clear that the building stood as a *praetorium* in the midst of an unusually rich estate orientated towards the maritime trade.

As has already been noticed by I. Fisković, overall layout of the central building implies that it was completely adjusted to the ceremonial function. Large apsidal hall, much alike many halls of the contemporary luxurious villas all around the Roman west, served without doubt as a reception space. It is much harder to determine the exact functions of the lateral rooms.⁷⁸ However, if we once again turn to the late 3rd and 4th century examples we can assume that they served similar purpose as the lateral rooms in 4th century palace in Ravenna, or as the ones in villas in Mediana, Montana 1 and 2, Majdan, Budakalsz, El Val, etc. The rooms probably served as record offices and storage premises of all that

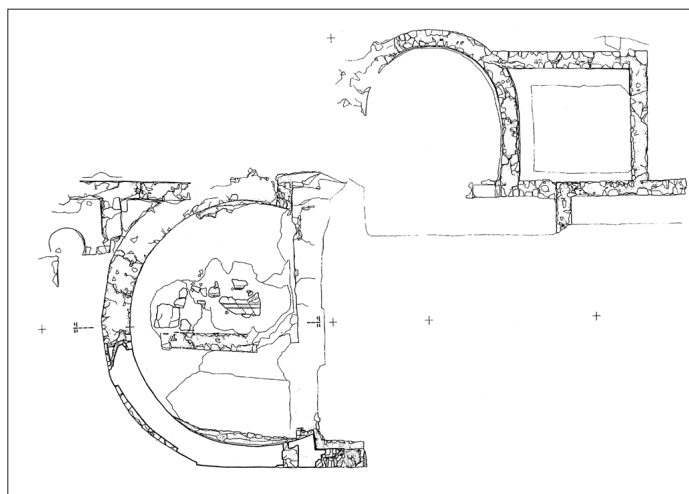


Fig. 13. Plan of the multi-foiled building in Polače (FISKOVIĆ 1999)

was needed to support the rituals conducted in the hall. Considering the probable main function of the hall, which will be explained further, we can conclude that the hall was primarily the place for business related to the maritime trade.

As already mentioned, in the immediate vicinity of the central building, some 30 m to the west, ruins of a multi-foiled building are still observable. Distinctive shape of the building (fig. 13), in which the fragments of the mosaic floor with the yet unidentified motif were found, indicates that it most probably served as a *triclinium* and not as baths, as some researchers speculated.⁷⁹ Thus the place for *otium* was separated from the main building, completely in accordance with the conventions of the time.⁸⁰ The remains of the building remind of the dining rooms in Ravenna, Mediana, Diocletian's palace and Romuliana, which were attached in the same way to the main reception space.

Returning to the main apsed hall, some issues should be mentioned since they directly point to the time when it was built. For example, on the inside of the walls of the reception hall, more precisely on the western wall, the line of holes at the height of some 8 m are still visible, suggesting that the hall indeed had an upper floor as de Azevedo and Dyggve thought. However, some objections to the theory that the hall had an upper floor could be put forward. First of all, if the building was indeed built in the 4th century, as its façade suggests, than the existence of the first floor of the reception hall is out of question, as we do not find that particular design in that century. Furthermore, if the substructures were designed to level the first floor, 8 m high substructures would, by their height, represent an anomaly, as there was no actual reason for such an extreme elevation of the floor. Finally, the height of the hall, if it was built in the 4th century, should be compared with contemporary halls, like the ones in Cercadilla, Trier, Piazza Armerina, etc., which were all of considerable height. Thus, the hypothesis of the existence of the first floor in Polače could be confronted by a number of arguments. One of them is, also, that the hall had an interior decoration of walls much a like *Aula Regia* in *Domus Flavia*.

However, only an architectural examination of the walls of the "palace" could clarify to which building phase the holes on the western wall belong to. In the meantime the issue can only be discussed in light of morphological comparison of individual parts of the building.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

All in all, when it comes to the planimetric disposition it seems that L. Mulvin was correct in her classification of the “palace” in Polače.⁸¹ The compact plan of this pseudo-fortified building shares many features with the other structures Mulvin included in the type of the pseudo-fortified villa. A tendency toward the symmetrical layout, two towered façade, lack of real defensive system, clear axial disposition of rooms, clearly indicates that the “palace” in Polače was in fact the most luxurious relative of the northern villas that Mulvin has included into the type. But, as has been demonstrated, the layout of the main building in Polače also shares many traits with other late 3rd or 4th century *praetoria* that could be found from Moesia to Hispania and across Italy.

So, considering the morphology of the building in Polače it seems that there should be no doubt about the time when it was built. It is the proper 4th century structure with the most of the traits favored in the villa architecture of the time. Sizable reception hall of the almost “imperial” proportions, shows that in the case of this villa the accent has been put on the reception space that dominated the whole complex in Polače, the façade functioning as an obvious sign of the owner’s status and wealth, the axial layout which was adjusted to the needs of the ceremonial, all confirm that the structure in Polače was built in the 4th century and not the 5th, as has been hypothesized. Furthermore, the possibility that the structure was built in the 5th century should be ruled out on account of the lack of comparative material from that time. Although there are a few 5th century examples of villas on the Apennine peninsula built in this century none of them actually had anything in common with Polače. Often mentioned villa in San Giovanni di Ruoti with its single tower, compact plan and the positioning of the reception space on the first floor differs in all aspects from Polače, where there was originally no upper floor, where the façade was clearly articulated with a motif which we do not find in San Giovanni, and where we find a kind of *Streuhof* plan of the complex. Nor can Polače be compared to the 5th century examples from Northern Italy. Theodorik’s palace in Galeata is clearly a reflection of a villa type often found in the northern provinces from the 1st century AD. “Palace” in Polače has a traditional axial orientation of the main (apsed) hall and it had almost nothing in common with this northern type, except for the fact that the two towers attached to its façade. The villa in Palazzolo, with a plan arranged around the courtyard, and its corner bastions of irregular shape, belongs to a completely different type of villa. In fact, there is no 5th century palace with which Polače could be compared. On the other hand, there are a number of 4th century examples which share many similar traits.

CLOSER ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE “PALACE”

Fortunately, certain characteristics of the central building in Polače point more precisely to the time when it was built. As Dyggve noticed, the apse had a distinct polygonal shape with nine facets on the outside, while from the inside it was rounded. Because of such a shape of the apse Dyggve concluded that the building must have been built under the influence of the architecture of Ravenna in the first half of the 6th century. He labeled the building as an example of the “Adrio-Byzantine” architecture influenced by the church architecture of Ravenna.



Fig. 14. View of the western tower in Polače (photo by T. Turšković)

On the one hand, it could seem that Dyggve was correct in his conclusions. But then we have to remind ourselves of the unusual number of facets of the apse which cannot be found on any of the 6th century buildings in Ravenna. Furthermore, we should remind ourselves that the apse was built by same the craftsmen who had built two multi-angular towers of the “palace”, which were also round on the inside and polygonal in the exterior. The question arises whether it would be more appropriate to attribute the polygonality of the apse to the standard practice of the masons who introduced here their usual building techniques, and not to the deliberate imitation of the architecture of Ravenna? So, the question is – from where did this workshop come from?

Certainly, the multi-angular shape of the towers is indicative. We know that on Mljet the polygonality of the towers was regulated by the *post festum* cutting of the towers’ surface thus making them regular in shape (fig. 14). So, it appears that here the polygonality was an esthetical device as well as a product of usual practice of the workshop. The problem is that the towers of this shape are almost nonexistent in ancient and late antique architecture, civil and military alike.

Thanks to the systematizations of H. von Petrikovits, S. Johnson and M. Reddé we now have a pretty good insight into the types and development of civil and military fortifications in late antique period.⁸² But, among the examples of late antique fortifications there are only two instances in Europe of towers which could be compared with those in Polače. Such a shape was clearly an anomaly in late Roman fortification architecture, which tended to use octagonal and various other forms, but seldom the multi-angular forms with twelve, fourteen or sixteen sides.

Towers in Polače were actually based on a fourteen sided plan, but the two sides (one full front and two halves) were cut off by the entrance corridor. Thus, up to the top of the gallery towers projected with its twelve sides (fig. 10). This rare polygonal design of towers with more than eight sides can be found on the imperial palace of Emperor Galerius in Gamzigrad (fig. 15). The whole design of the imposing second set of fortifications relied on the impression that the twenty unproportionately large multi-angular towers produced (fig. 11).⁸³ This second set of fortifications, enveloping the older ones, in many respects similar to those of the Diocletian’s palace in Split or the ones found on another tetrarchic palace in Šarkamen, were obviously a symbolic expression of the Galerius’ power that he acquired later in his career. Imposing towers of his palace must have been one of the main instruments for the representation of the Emperor’s power.

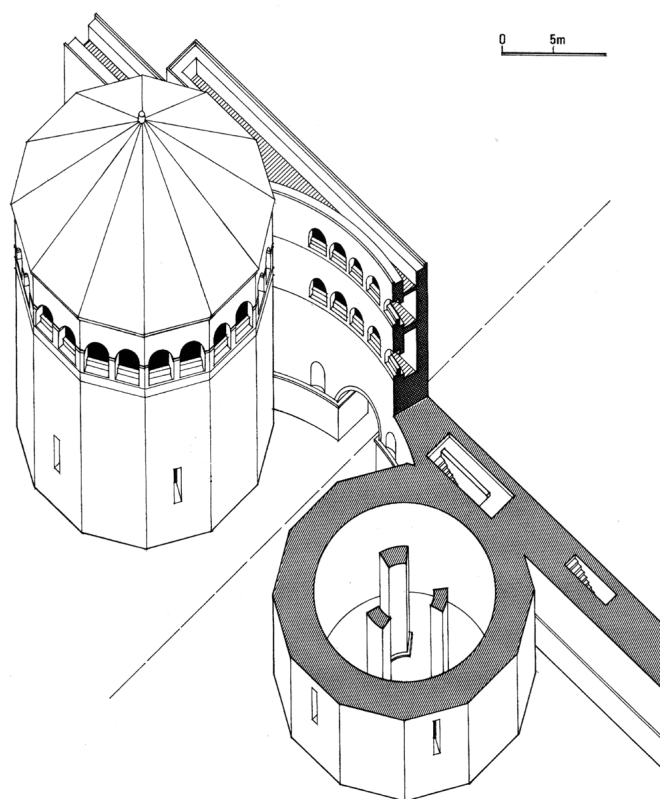


Fig. 15. Hypothetical axonometric reconstruction of an entrance into Romuliana (ČURČIĆ 1993)

Although the towers of *Romuliana* were more than twice the size of those on Mljet and had interior supporting pillars, the concept is identical to the ones in Polače – multi-angular from the outside, round on the inside. There are some further similarities between them. *Romuliana*'s towers were extremely projected from the surface of the thick perimeter wall. In almost the same way the towers in Polače project from the main body of the building. *Romuliana*'s twenty towers were unproportionately large and unusually crowded along the perimeter wall in a very particular way. Similar disproportion is one of the prominent features of the towers on Mljet. Taking into account all these similarities it is

hard not to suppose that the fortifications of the imperial palace were in a certain way model for the façade of the main building in Polače. Moreover, the fact that the only two examples of dodecagonal towers with rounded interior wall are actually found in the Galerius' dominion points to the evident relation between the two palaces.⁸⁴

Here one should also mention the fortress in York with its eight multi-angular towers surrounding the *porta praetoria*, thus creating the powerful vista of the main façade of the fortress (fig. 16). These towers were even more similar to the ones in Polače bay, as they also had a fourteen sided plan. As has been pointed out by the researchers, fourteen sided plan of these towers, as well as their size, made them unique in Britain.⁸⁵ Because of their distinctive shape and size (corner ones had a diameter of 13.7 m, interval towers had a diameter of 9.4 m), as well as because of the imperial character of the fortress, it was assumed that they were built about the same time as the second defensive perimeter in *Romuliana*.⁸⁶ Furthermore, it was proposed that the same architect of the Galerius' palace might have designed the towers of the fortress and that they were constructed by an imperial decree of Constantius or Constantine. All of these hypotheses seem plausible as the towers of the two buildings are surely closest relatives. But, the same reasoning could be applied to the "palace" in Polače, whose towers were similar to those of *Romuliana*, as well as those in York. In fact, they were so similar that it seems credible that all of them were designed by the architects of *Romuliana*.

There is one more very significant connection between the structure from Mljet and the Galerius' imperial palace at Gamzigrad. This link is the building technique. As Dyggve noticed, walls of the "palace" in Polače were built in a very distinctive technique, in which large and mostly uncut stones of similar dimensions were laid in strips in between of the thinner slabs. They are all neatly laid in horizontal bands, very regular and with a specific building skill. Dyggve has noticed that the technique could be attributed to craftsmen who were primarily skilled in building with tiles. For that reason Dyggve was inclined to believe that the builders must have came from Ravenna. But, when we consider the techniques used on *Romuliana*, and compare them

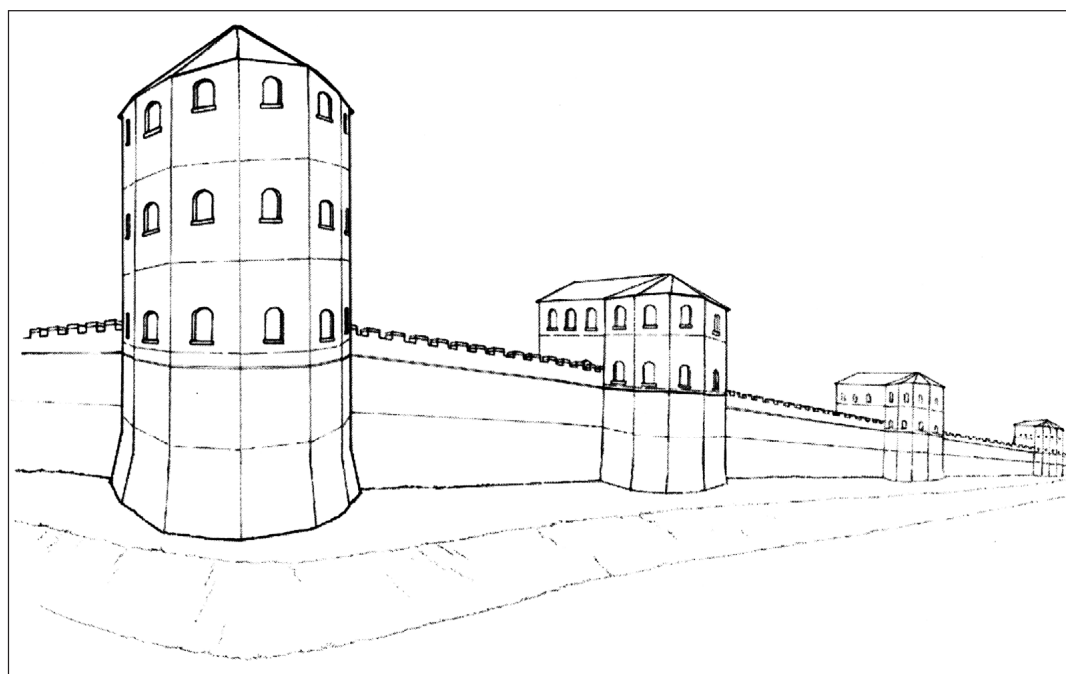


Fig. 16. Reconstruction of the south-west wall and towers of the fortress at York (BIDWELL et al. 2009)

to the "palace" in Polače, we can perceive the connection. Walls of *Romuliana* were mostly built in *opus mixtum* that combines three strips of thin bricks with a couple of bands of cut stones, but as it seems, some of the walls of the main residential complex were built without bricks. In that part the technique becomes extremely similar to the one used in Polače. But even in spite of that, walls of Polače "palace" surely remind us of the *opus mixtum* in which bricks were replaced by thin limestone slabs. So, it looks like Dyggve's impression was altogether correct. Technique in which the walls of the Polače "palace" were built look like an adaptation of the one used in Gamzigrad.⁸⁷

It should be kept in mind that the way in which the walls of the "palace" were built is not common in the Dalmatian surrounding. Neatness of execution, careful building in horizontal bands with the alteration of thinner and thicker bands, denotes a skillful workshop which must have arrived, as Dyggve presumed, from some well established center. We believe that in the way the walls and towers were constructed there are enough indications that the architectural and technical idea was imported from the *Dacia Ripensis* at the beginning of the 4th century.

There is yet another architectural connection between Polače and *Romuliana*, obviously derived from the same building convention. In front of the apse in Polače we find two projections of lateral walls into the space of the apse, projected in the identical way as it was done in all the halls of the *Romuliana* palace. However insignificant at the first sight, this detail, documented on both structures, appears to further confirm the possibility that they were built by the same craftsmen.

All arguments taken into consideration, we can conclude with a high degree of certainty that the morphological details and the building technique point to the first half of the 4th century as the most probable time the "palace" in Polače was built. It was obviously built at the same time, or after the second set of fortifications of *Romuliana*, and was in all likeness the product of the same architects and the same workshop or some of its members engaged on *Romuliana*.

THE ISLAND OF MLJET – AN IMPERIAL PROPERTY

Historical circumstances further clarify the reasons why such a luxurious building, unique on the eastern Adriatic coast, was built exactly at the beginning of the 4th century. As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs, attention of the researchers was captivated by the fact that Mljet was a relatively wealthy estate at the end of the 5th century and in the first half of the 6th century.

However, one valuable piece of evidence overlooked and only partially interpreted shows that the estate was even wealthier in the preceding centuries. This evidence is an inscription that was discovered in 1973 near the western church.⁸⁸ The inscription was set up by a certain *vilicus* Magnus *pro salute* of his master C. Balbinianus, for whose health and well being *vilicus* enlarged a temple dedicated to *Liber Pater*. M. Zaninović has convincingly shown that the inscription should be dated to the second half of the 2nd century according to the onomastic formula employed. Nevertheless, it should be also added that the inscription reveals a few interesting facts which were unnoticed in previous research.

First of all, judging by the name of the master to whom the *vilicus* dedicated the inscription, it is obvious that the Balbinianus was a freedman of a wealthy Dalmatian and

an ex-slave of the possible governor of Dalmatia *Publius Coelius Balbinus Vibullius Pius*, whose *praenomen* and *nomen* are attested on a series of inscriptions of his freedmen buried around Salona.⁸⁹ As a private procurator of Balbinus, Balbinianus was obviously manumitted *cum pecunio* of which Magnus was a part. Thus we come to the conclusion that by the second half of the 2nd century the island of Mljet was leased to a wealthy Dalmatian who has prospered because of the imperial connections. But, even more surprising is the fact that a certain *vilicus* had at his disposal an unusually high amount of money, which he spent on the reconstruction of the temple of Liber.⁹⁰ Such an enterprise is quite unusual when it comes to dedications of *vilici* all around the Roman world.⁹¹ Magnus obviously supervised the estate, which already generated significant income. That income allowed him to use the master's money to enlarge the temple in honor of his owner, from whom he expected early manumission. So, the inscription confirms that Mljet was already a wealthy estate by the end of the 2nd century, probably even wealthier than at the end of the 5th century.

And there is no reason why it should not have been so wealthy. The fact that Mljet was an imperial property was often repeated, but it was never explained how it came to be a part of *fiscus*. However, the confirmation can be found in Appian's description of the Octavian's conquest of Illyricum. Appian tells us that the population of the island *Melite* (Mljet), as well as that of nearby *Korkyra* (Korčula), were subjected to the severest possible punishment brought on them because of the crime of piracy.⁹² Male Illyrian population of the two islands, resisting the Roman occupation, was immediately put to death while all others were sold to slavery.⁹³ One does not have to be an expert in Roman law to know that this punishment meant that the former property of the population accused of the crime against the state instantly became a *bona damnatorum* and at the same time *bona vacantia*.⁹⁴ There is one other legal option which could have been applied in the case of Mljet, and that was the possibility that right after the execution of the punishment it became Augustus' (or Agrippa's) *manubia*. Either way, the island became a property of the state and in the future it would formally or informally become a part of the imperial *fiscus* with the Augustus' reorganization of provinces.

So, it could be ascertained that the island became a part of *fiscus* at an early time. In the second half of the 2nd century the estate was evidently leased to a wealthy Dalmatian *conductor*, like many state's and imperial properties. But, in the case of Mljet, one question asserts itself at this moment. The question is: how come that the island which had very limited amounts of arable land became so rich until the end of the second century, so that a *vilicus* could afford to extend a temple at his own expense? Its economy in ancient times must have depended on the traditional production of wood, olive oil and vine. Its economic baseline was by no means extraordinary. So from where did the surplus come from? There is only one answer to this question, and I believe that it most convincingly explains the reasons why the infrastructure in Polače was upgraded at the beginning of the 4th century.

PORTORIUM STATION IN POLAČE

I. Fisković has already suggested that a *portorium* station was situated in Polače and that the bay was one of the important overnight anchorages for the ships sailing along the eastern Adriatic coast.⁹⁵ Indeed, underwater archaeological

finds confirmed that the Polače bay had two piers, earlier one to the west of the central building discussed here, and a later one built east of the main hall.⁹⁶ The remains found in the underwater research cover the full spread from the 2nd till the 7th century AD. But, according to the reports, the majority of finds in Polače bay are dated to the 4th and some of them to the 5th century. An abundance of North African vessels, 4th or 5th century dishes, lamps dating from the 3rd to the 5th century, an indicative and rare find of a lamp of the Syrian or Palestine provenance dated to the 4th century, large number of coins from Constantine's time and 4th century *amphorae*, all point to the fact that Polače bay played an important part in the maritime trade during the 4th and 5th century, with the peak of economic activity at the beginning of the 4th century.⁹⁷ Judging by the wealth of archaeological material found in the aquatorium it can only be concluded that the bay indeed was the place where the *portorium* was charged on cargoes being imported or exported from the province of Dalmatia.

It is a well known fact that Diocletian's reform of provinces changed the outline of the southeastern borders of Dalmatia, whose southern part was cut off and shaped into the province of Praevalitana. Border between Dalmatia and Praevalitana became one of the major dividing lines between the eastern and western part of the Empire.⁹⁸ It ran along the river Drina and was reaching Adriatic at the Kotor bay, just to the south of the ancient town of Epidaurum and south of Mljet.

Sailing routes along eastern Adriatic coast have changed a little in the Antiquity. The same routes were used by the Greek sailors between the 7th and 5th century B.C. and by the Roman and other sailors later.⁹⁹ There are a few particularities in these routes that make the island of Mljet especially important. First of all, sailing either southwards or northwards through the Adriatic, currents and winds dictated the passage of ships through the Mljet channel,

i.e. sailing along the northern shores of Mljet between the Pelješac peninsula and Mljet (fig. 17). Sailing to the north, maritime route branched in two major directions. One lead towards the islands of Vis and Palagruža, and from there across Tremiti to the coasts of the Apennine peninsula. It was in fact one of the quickest ways across the Adriatic and the only natural route allowed by the currents (fig. 18). It was the route by which Agrippa's fleet most probably crossed the Adriatic in 34 B.C. and was surely one of the ways which was frequently used by the emperors of Illyrian descent of the 3rd and 4th century. The other branch lead towards the islands of central Dalmatia and finally the provincial capital Salona. From the earliest times one of the major trading destinations was also Naron, administrative and trading centre of the southernmost judicial convent of the province of Dalmatia. Unlike Salona, which had to be connected by roads with the wealthy Dalmatian inland rich in gold, silver and other ores, Naron had a natural and direct connection with its hinterland by way of the Neretva river. So, in several respects Mljet was situated on the major route through the Adriatic, as the rich archaeological finds in Mljet's aquatorium confirm. In fact, Mljet has always been the first major off shore stop for anyone entering the province of Dalmatia. South of it, ships could only be navigated by following the outlines of the coast. But, with Mljet they departed from the mainland and were navigated by the islands all the way to the cape Ploče, northwest of the ancient *Tragurium* and the traditional maritime barrier between Liburnian and Dalmatian territories.

Moreover, there is another indicative fact related to the sailing the Adriatic which attracted considerable attention. Namely, the fact that the changes of the direction of wind near Otrant caused several unexpected shipwrecks by the shores of Mljet.¹⁰⁰ It seems that winds and currents lead northwards from Otrant directly towards Mljet as the pivotal point in the southern Adriatic. Most recently, an

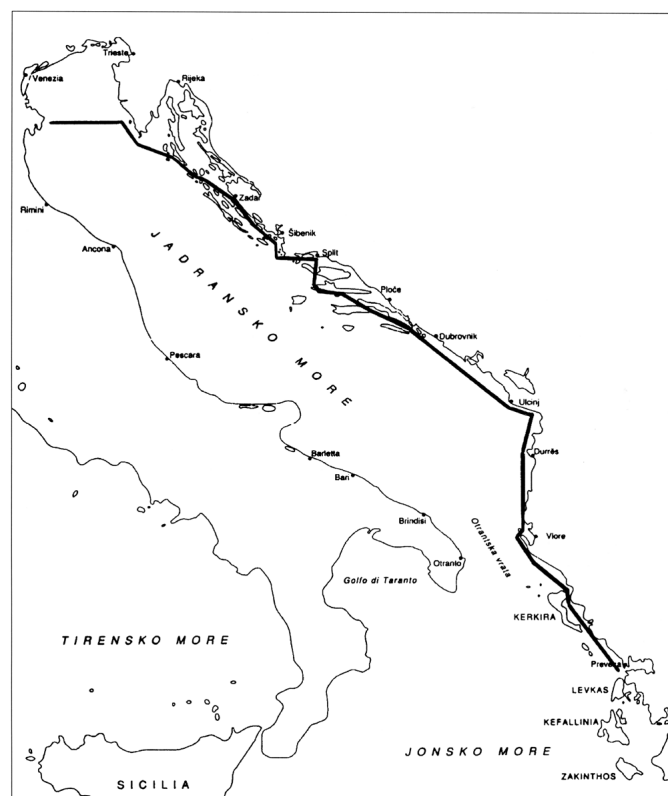


Fig. 17. Principal navigational route through Adriatic (KOZLIČIĆ, BRATANIĆ 2006)

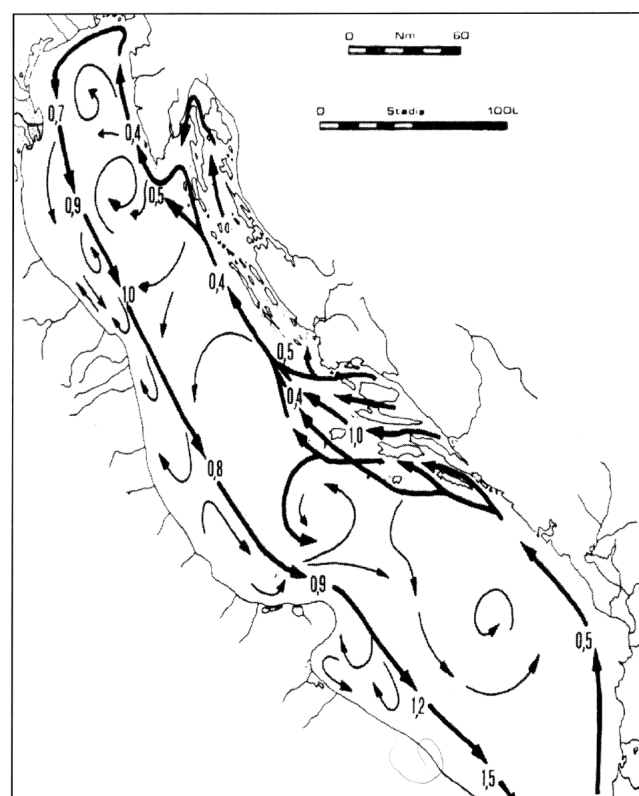


Fig. 18. Sea currents in Adriatic (KOZLIČIĆ, BRATANIĆ 2006)

ecological crisis happened in the winter 2010 on the shores of Pelješac and Mljet, when the currents brought the waste from Albania and Montenegro. The same currents have obviously shipwrecked the boat transporting St. Paul in 61 AD and maybe the command ship of Justinian's general Artabanus in 540 AD.¹⁰¹

Thus, taking into account the geographical position of Mljet, advantages for anchorage in the bays of Pomena and Polače on the island, the position that Mljet held on the major sailing route through Adriatic, extraordinary number of finds in its aquatorium, the number of shipwrecks documented along its coasts, and the fact that in Polače we find one of the most luxurious buildings on the eastern Adriatic shore, we should conclude that Mljet was obviously an extremely frequented harbor for a long time. In fact, with the separation of Praevalitana it had to become the first stop for all ships entering Dalmatia and its coastal waters. Following this logic, with the formation of Praevalitana Mljet must have acquired new importance as an anchorage, entry point into Dalmatia and thus as a *portorium* station, charging the taxes on all goods entering or being exported from the province. Again, finds in the aquatorium testify that the trade in the harbor was intensified exactly at the beginning of the 4th century.¹⁰² All the facts presented point to the fact that one of them was situated in Polače.

We should now remind ourselves of the reforms of taxation system which lasted from the time of Marcus Aurelius till the time of Diocletian, which excluded *conductores* from the process of collation of imperial taxes.¹⁰³ As *portorium* was an imperial tax, it is only logical to suppose that Polače as a *portorium* station was returned under the control of imperial *procuratores* by the end of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century, when the control over tax farming was put under the direct supervision of imperial officials.¹⁰⁴ Estate on Mljet was surely not an isolated case since most of the imperial properties in Dalmatia, most of all mines in the Dalmatian inland, have already been put under procurators' care by the beginning of the 3rd century.

It should not be forgotten that the procuratorial service gained importance towards the age of Dominate. As P. A. Brunt and S. de Laet pointed out, imperial *procuratores*, mostly of the equestrian status, acquired with time real judicial power in cases related to *portorium*. This was most probably the result of change in the way *portorium* was collated from the end of the 2nd century.¹⁰⁵ Although their juridical power was limited to the fiscal issues related to the imperial taxes, the procuratorial courts certainly presided over many cases against those who have been accused of harming the imperial *fiscus*. In the case of Mljet, as an obviously frequented entry point to Dalmatia and a likely *portorium* station, the existence of a procuratorial court would be obligatory as the goods, those imported to be sold as well as those imported or exported for private use, were here subject to taxation or seized till the dispute related to the cargo could be solved by the imperial *procurator*.

Finally, considering all these briefly presented facts, which could be complemented by a significantly more detailed argumentation, it should be concluded that the complex in Polače must have been built by imperial officials on the imperial property, located on a position which became most lucrative by the beginning of the 4th century. This is exactly why an imperial symbol was emphasized on the façade of the building, whose planimetric disposition reveals that it might have served primarily as judicial and ceremonial space. Procuratorial elite of the age, including the *procurator rei*

privatae for Dalmatia and all other imperial administrators, must have frequented Mljet, as it became one of the crucial imperial properties in the province.

The exact time and the sequence of events which lead to the building of the "palace" in Polače cannot be determined exactly yet. However, presented arguments all point out to the beginning of the 4th century. Formal features of the main building, dimensions, building technique, analogies with similar buildings, underwater finds in the bay, historical and geographical context confirm that we are dealing with a building that was a product of the 4th century and with all probability an imperial structure which can only be compared with other imperial palaces mostly located in the relative vicinity of Mljet.¹⁰⁶ Late antique Mljet was located on the margins of the huge imperial dominion which extended across several northern Illyrian provinces. So, it is not surprising that the builders of the imperial palace in Gamzigrad were engaged on the building of Polače. But, the answer to the question who actually ordered the building of the "palace" still remains elusive and could be only provided by future archaeological research. It could have been the imperial procurators who ordered the building using the surplus of the financial resources collated, or it could have been an administrative aristocrat to whom the estate was leased after Diocletian's time. It could have also been built by the Emperor as something Millar called, in architectural sense, a *comitatus*, actually a *palatium* used for accommodation of the Emperor and his entourage when travelling.¹⁰⁷ The most likely candidates are the emperors Galerius or Licinius, because the building was obviously designed by *Romuliana's* architects, who were decommissioned in *Romuliana* with Galerius' death, but were most likely commissioned by Licinius.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, there is one other possible connection between Licinius and Mljet, and the surrounding islands. It has been noticed by several researchers of the Dalmatian toponymy that the etymology of the present name of the small island of Jakljan, nearest to Mljet, has a Latin root. P. Skok has pointed out that the name of the island (also called Lakljan, Lahnjan and Jaknjan) derived from the medieval name *Lichignana*, which in turn was derived from its ancient name *Licinianum*.¹⁰⁹ P. Šimunović agreed with Skok and added that the *Insula Liciniana* must have acquired its name as a *praedium* of a certain Licinius who, in his opinion, might have been a veteran soldier.¹¹⁰ However, considering that Mljet was an imperial property, as well as were some parts of its surrounding, it is more probable that the name of the island derived from the name of the emperor *Gaius Valerius Licinianus Licinius*, the likely *maître d'œuvre* in Polače.

SUBSEQUENT FUNCTION OF THE "PALACE"

Fortunately, when it comes to the original and the subsequent function of the "palace" we have a first class comparative material from the Dalmatian soil. Diocletian's palace situated in an immediate vicinity of Salona, which was originally, we believe, intended to be occupied by numerous imperial officials and administrators, whose offices were logically placed in the newly built imperial infrastructure near the province's capital. This is best confirmed by the way in which the northern part of the palace was structured, with possible residential apartments arranged on the inside of the perimeter walls. There were many speculations about the occupants of Diocletian's palace in the past decades. Most of them were based on the self sufficient argumentations, which have ignored the pure logic of the purpose of the imperial palace and its parts, or were basically general speculations of the possible role that the palace played in

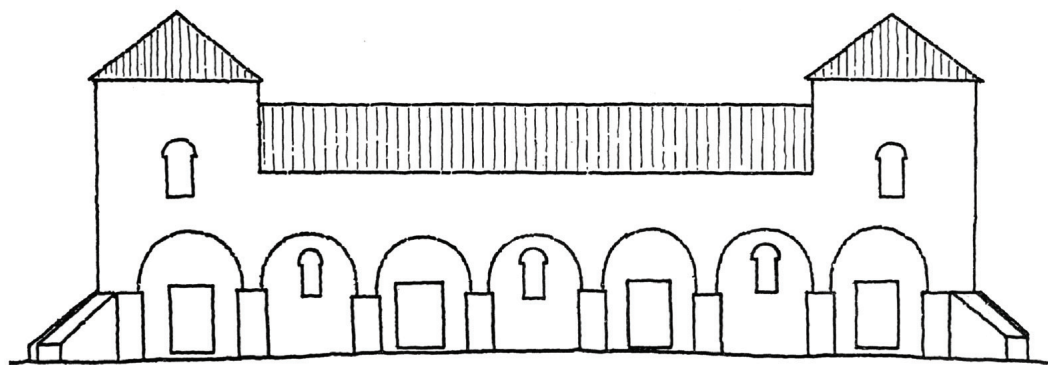


Fig. 19. Plan of the „palace“ in Ostrvica (RAPANIĆ 1984)

the suburban landscape between the towns of Salona and Epetium. Crucial evidence that some imperial offices were indeed transferred from Salona to the palace comes from the *Notitia dignitatum*, from which we learn that one of the imperial procurators actually had an office in Aspalato.¹¹¹ So, there is no reason why we should suspect that an imperial establishment of this kind would be left empty of the officials whose natural surrounding it was in the period following Diocletian's death.¹¹² It functioned as it functioned before and there is obvious evidence that it was used as such in the first half of the 5th century.

The Gothic rule over Dalmatia did not leave any evident marks on the palatial architecture in Spalato. Furthermore, there is no evidence that it had left any mark on the luxurious residential suburban architecture in Dalmatia at all. Still, already mentioned “palace” in the modern village of Ostrvica, which was in the ancient times situated by the road connecting the towns of Salona and Narona, has been dated to the period of the Gothic rule and imagined as a hunting lodge of some Gothic nobleman.¹¹³ This construction has an obvious correlation with de Azevedo's interpretation of the “palace” in Polače and shares most of its flaws. As in the case of Polače, arguments for the datation of the “palace” in Ostrvica to the end of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th century are weak or non-existent. The comparison with Theodoric's palace in Galeata (near Forlì), which was the main argument in favor of such a datation, could be convincing if the structure in Ostrvica (fig. 19) did have the *piano nobile*. But, there is no indication that it did. Furthermore, the offered reconstruction of the façade in Ostrvica has little in common with the construction of the palace in Galeata. Of course, they belong to the same type of the so-called *Porticus Villa mit Eckrisaliten*, but this is the only connection between the two.

In fact, the “palace” has much more in common with the main buildings of the villas in the northern provinces, where this type was preferred already from the 1st century AD. Comparisons with 2nd or 3rd century villas from Germaniae Inferior and Superior and Raetia, as well as with Italian 5th century villas and palaces, shows that the “palace” in Ostrvica could have been built at any other time but the second half of the 5th century, as it lacks the main feature of 5th century palaces and villas – the upper floor.

Thus there are no arguments to support the often repeated opinion that the time of the Gothic presence in Dalmatia witnessed a large scale *ex novo* building undertakings in Ostrvica, on Mljet or any other place in the coastal region of Dalmatia. There are also no real proofs that the 5th century in Dalmatia was the time of any major undertakings in villa and palatial architecture on a scale with which we are confronted in Polače and Ostrvica. On the other hand, we have an abundance of proofs that palatial structures such as Diocletian's palace continued to be used with the same intensity and for the same purpose till the middle of the 5th century, and with a somewhat lowered frequency from then on.

So we are forced to look back to the 4th century as the period in which such undertakings were not exceptions, but a rule. When compared with central buildings of the 4th century villas owned by the administrative elites and agricultural magnates propelled by their relations to the imperial government, as well because of their importance for the centralized economy of the Empire, the “palace” in Polače appears to be a typical product of its time. With this in mind, proper examination of the central building and the parts of the whole complex around the “palace” should begin.

¹ The following article contains the theses already partially presented at the symposium “Dani Cvita Fiskovića” held in Pomena (Mljet) in the fall 2010.

² Western wall of the hall is still preserved up to around 12 m. The walls of adjoining rooms and the western tower are also preserved to a considerable height of around 10 m. Unfortunately, the apse has been almost completely destroyed, obviously by landslides from the surrounding hills. In most parts, eastern wall of the hall and the walls of adjoining rooms were incorporated into the modern date houses. Still some of its parts were recorded by Stošić, Tenšek, Valjato-Vrus and Žile, authors of the revised plan of the building. See J. STOŠIĆ, I. TENŠEK, I. VALJATO-VRUS, I. ŽILE, *Ispravljeni tlocrt kasnoantičke palače na otoku Mljetu*, in *Obavijesti HAD-a*, No. 3, year XXXIV, Zagreb, 2002, pp. 98-105.

³ Although approximately some 130 Antique and Late antique villas have been recorded in the coastal area of the province of Dalmatia. Some were located on sizable estates, while the majority were simple *villae rusticae*. But, in many cases, or rather in the majority of cases, indications in what way, if any, they were modified and used during the late antique period are still scant. If we count in the villas from the vast Dalmatian inland we are reaching the number of over 300 objects or complexes which can be classified as villas. These numbers surely point that the province's

landscape was in fact well organized and exploited just like in other parts of the Roman west. Furthermore, the number of villas in Dalmatia could be even significantly larger considering the state of the research. For example, some coastal regions are still blank spots because they were never subject to any research related to Roman villas. For example, on account of various finds we can assume that there were several large villas belonging to the wealthy local aristocracy on the island of Rab (ancient Arba), but except one on the Kaštelina peninsula none of them were ever explored. The same could be said about almost every Dalmatian island, as well as of the coast. For a more or less complete catalogue of the coastal villas see A. KILIĆ-MATIĆ, *Rimske villae rusticae na istočnoj jadranskoj obali*, MS thesis, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Zagreb), Zagreb, 2002. For villas from the Dalmatian inland see A. BUSULADŽIĆ, *Rimske vile u Bosni i Hercegovini*, PhD thesis, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Zagreb), Zagreb, 2008.

⁴ A. MOCSY, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia. A History of the Middle Danube Provinces of the Roman Empire*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London-Boston, 1974, pp. 244 and 295; M. MIRKOVIĆ, *Villas et domaines dans l'Illyricum central (IV^e - VI^e siècle)*, in *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta XXXV (Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'études byzantines XXXV)*, Beograd, 1996, pp. 57-75; E. B. THOMAS, *Villa settlements*, in *The archaeology of Roman Pannonia*, A. LENGYEL, G. T. B. RADAN (eds.), Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1980, pp. 275-321; L. MULVIN, *Late Roman Villas in the Danube - Balkan Region*, BAR International Series, Oxford, 2002.

⁵ The only attempt to put some light on the issue was made by V. Begović and I. Schrunck in V. BEGOVIĆ i I. SCHRUNK, *Preobrazbe rimskih vila na istočnom Jadranu u kasnoj antici i ranom srednjem vijeku*, in *Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu*, vol. 18/2001, Zagreb, 2001, pp. 157-172.

⁶ In the case of imperial mines in the Dalmatian inland the picture is pretty much clear. S. Dušanić has shown that all of the Dalmatian mines were imperial property. Their administration changed at the beginning of the 3rd century when they passed into the direct control of imperial procurators (first imperial freedmen and then *equites* from at least 228 AD). Similar changes were introduced into the taxation system in Illyricum at the time of Marcus Aurelius or Commodus. But, as to the imperial possessions in the coastal region, no conclusions can be drawn yet. In fact, the question of the imperial possessions in this region has never been properly studied. Obviously, some parts of the coast and some islands were imperial properties. It will be explained further in this article that the islands of Mljet and Korčula were indeed the imperial possession. Obviously the area around Diocletian's palace was also an imperial possession. We can only assume that the villa and the surrounding Hyllus peninsula was also a part of *fiscus* in Dalmatia as it could be identified as a toponym *Praetorium Caesaris* mentioned by the Anonymous from Ravenna and again noted on the *Tabula Peutingeriana* as *Ad praetorium*. Arbitration of a *procurator Augusti* in a delimitation between the properties in the area of the Burnum's *ex prata legionis* could indicate that an imperial estate was situated on the west banks of river Krka (ancient *Titius*). Further north, the island Dugi otok, judging by the presence of an imperial slave and by the remains of the luxurious villa in Mala Proversa, could have also been an imperial property. Next to these properties, it is most probable that the quarries on the island Brač (ancient *Brattia*) also belonged to *fiscus*. They provided the building material for the imperial palaces in Sirmium and Spalato, as well for Licinius's baths in Sirmium. In the southern Dalmatian judicial convent, near Narona, there is also a *castrum* at Mogorjelo, whose shape again indicates that the structure could have been a part of the logistic tail leading to the imperial mines in the Dalmatian inland. There is no doubt that it was built around Diocletian's time and it can be hypothesized that it was built on an imperial estate formerly leased to a *conductor*. But, even though the extent of the imperial properties in the coastal region is not known, it must have been of considerable size and importance around the year 400 when the office of the *procurator* of *res privata* for Dalmatia was located in Salona, or more likely in the palace in Aspalato. S. J. DE LAET, *Portorium: étude sur l'organisation douanière chez les Romains, surtout à l'époque du Haut-Empire, surtout à l'époque du Haut-Empire*, Ayer Publishing, 1949, pp. 403-415; S. DUŠANIĆ, *Aspects of Roman Mining in Noricum, Pannonia, Dalmatia, and Moesia Superior*, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II 6*, H. TEMPORINI, W. HASSE (eds.), Berlin-New York, 1977, pp. 52-94; A. M. HIRT, *Imperial Mines and Quarries in the Roman World: Organizational Aspects 27 BC-AD 235*, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 133-139; S. DUŠANIĆ, *Roman Mining in Illyricum: Historical Aspects*, in *Dall' Adriatico al Danubio - L'Ilirico nell'età greca e romana*, Atti del convegno internazionale, Cividale del Friuli, 25-27 settembre 2003, Pisa, Edizione Elettronica, pp. 247-270; A. ŠKEGRO, *Eksploracija srebra na području rimskih provincija Dalmacije i Panonije*, in *Opuscula archaeologica 22*, Zagreb, 1998, pp. 89-117; J. J. WILKES, *Dalmatia*, London, 1969, p. 392. Recently, in his presentation I. Basić has extensively discussed legal aspects of the ownership of the land on which the Diocletian's palace in Split was built. I. BASIĆ, *From the Late Antique history of the peninsula of Split*, presentation held in Pomena, Mljet as a part of the *Congress Metamorphosis of the Myth*, September 30th - October 3rd, 2010.

⁷ Villa in Mirje on the island of Brač, one of the islands closest to Salona and Diocletian's palace, seems to have been built exactly at the beginning of the 4th century, possibly for the procurator of the imperial quarries on the ancient *insula Brattia* or some other imperial official. The other one, a villa with an elaborate layout and of similar features, has been found on a distance of some ten kilometers east of Diocletian's palace. It was dated to the end of the 4th century, the time of the emperor Valentinian II on account of a numismatic find, although this could easily be just a *terminus ante quem* for this building, which in the layout bears an apparent resemblance to the villas in Bilice near modern day Šibenik, with the villa of the palatial proportions in Ostrvica near modern day Omiš, and with a villa on the island of Šolta. All of these buildings, with certain modifications, belonged to a type of villa with porticus and corner projections on the main façade. They were in fact main buildings of the wealthy estates designed to deliver a message of the owner's power and importance, and to serve as governing places of the estates. See V. KOVAČIĆ, *Kasnoantička vila s portikom na Mirju kod Postira*, in *Klesarstvo i graditeljstvo 3-4*, Pučišća, 2010, pp. 25-37; Ž. RAPANIĆ, *Kasnoantička "palaca" u Ostrvici kod Gata (Poljica)*, in *Cetinska krajina od prethistorije do dolaska Turaka*, Izdanja HAD-a 8, Split, 1984, pp. 149-161.

⁸ All of the 18 villas in the Dalmatian inland have been dated to this period. But, the number would be even larger if the other examples with less precise dating would be counted in. See A. BUSULADŽIĆ, *op. cit.*, pp. 206-212.

⁹ For example, villa in Livade (near *Sirmium*, but still inside the province Dalmatia), possibly imperial villa in Suvaja (near modern day Bosanska Dubica by the Sava river), Strupnić (in one of the fertile plains of the southern Dalmatia, north of Salona), Majdan near Mrkonjić grad, *castra* in Kakanj and Mogorjelo,

¹⁰ Furthermore, there are several extremely puzzling cases such as those of monumental and spacious buildings in Breza near Zenica and Ostrvica near the modern day town of Omiš. Building in Ostrvica will be discussed further in the article. For the building in Breza see I. BOJANOVSKI, DŽ. ČELIĆ, *Kasnoantička bazilika u Brezi*, in *Naše starine XII*, Sarajevo, 1969, pp. 7-25; T. LOOIJENGA, *Who wrote the Breza futhork, and why*, in *Grippe, Kamm und Eulenspiegel. Festschrift für Elmar Seebold zum 65. Geburtstag*, W. SCHINDLER, J. UNTERMANN (eds.), Berlin-New York, 1999, pp. 263-277.

¹¹ I would like to point out that it is not the aim of this article to discuss the issue of the terminological distinction between the terms *villa* and *palace*. The complex in Polače had all the features of a villa, as defined in the modern literature, but at the same time its main building had several palatial features (which could be also interpreted as features of "luxurious villa"). In fact, the term *praetorium* would be more appropriate for the central building with the meaning ascribed to the term by Rutilius Taurus Aemilianus Palladius and Cassiodorus. Still, the debate about the usage of the terms *palatium*, *villa* and *praetorium* is ongoing. Lately, F. Millar and I. Basić have put forward argumentations which show that late antique and later authors made a clear terminological distinction between various types of edifices, which could only be understood if one is acquainted with the context. However, in order to avoid additional discussion, the central building will be referred to in traditional manner as a "palace". About the terminological issue see I. BASIĆ, *Gradovi obalne Dalmacije u De administrando imperio: najstarija povijest Splita u svjetlu dvaju pojmova Konstantina VII Porfirogeneta*, in *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest 42*, Zagreb, 2010, pp. 61-82; F. MILLAR, *The Roman Emperor*

in the Roman World, Duckworth, London, 2001, pp. 41-53; J. THOMAS SMITH, *Roman villas: a study in social structure*, Routledge, 1997, pp. 172-198; L. MULVIN, *Late Roman Villa Plans: The Danube-Balkan Region, Recent research on the late antique countryside*, W. BOWDEN, L. LAVAN, C. MACHADO (eds.), Brill, Leiden, 2004, pp. 379-381; G. RIPOLL, J. ARCE, *The transformation and end of Roman villae in the west (fourth-seventh centuries): problems and perspectives*, in *Towns and their territories between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages*, G. P. BROGIOLO, N. GAUTHIER, N. CHRISTIE (eds.), Brill, Leiden, 2000, pp. 63-114., etc.

¹² The same could be said of the state of historical research of Dalmatia in the 5th century. The first partial overview (predominantly dealing with the age of the so-called "Dalmatian dynasty", i.e. the period between 454 and 480 AD) of the Dalmatian history in the 5th century was written by V. POSAVEC. It was preceded by a concise and instructive reviews of J. J. Wilkes and D. Basler, as well by several individual studies dealing with particular aspects of the Dalmatian history of the 5th century. See V. POSAVEC, *Dalmacija u vrijeme Marcelina i Julija Nepota*, Književni krug, Split, 2007; J. J. WILKES, *Dalmatia*, op. cit., pp. 416-437, D. BASLER, *Arhitektura kasnoantičkog doba u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Sarajevo, 1972.

¹³ As was explained by C. Fisković, the story of the exile of Agesilaus and his son Oppian to Mljet is a construction, which was obviously inspired by the position of the palace in Polače in a tranquil setting of Polače bay. It first appeared at the beginning of the 16th century in Dubrovnik and was apparently invented to counterbalance another pseudo historical construction which attributed the founding of the neighboring town of Korkyra to Antenor of Troy. See C. FISKOVIĆ, *Spomenici otoka Mljeta*, in *Otok Mljet – naš novi nacionalni park*, Govedari, 1980, pp. 39-40.

¹⁴ It is interesting that the story of Agesilaus is still being treated by some as a historical fact, although it is an obvious fabrication. See, for example, Ž. PEKOVIĆ, *Otok Sv. Marija na Velikom jezeru*, in *Hrvatski arheološki godišnjak* No. 3/2006, Zagreb, 2007, pp. 463-466.

¹⁵ Both are still uninterpreted. However, one of them could be interpreted as a dedication inscription to Diana Nemorensis which would make all the sense since the main asset of the island has always been the wood. The island of Mljet is still renowned because of the richness of its pine tree forests, which were highly exploited in the more recent centuries. In ancient times, pine wood was especially sought by the silver mines where the charcoal made of pine trees was preferred because of its properties. It should be taken into account that Dalmatia (at least its northern part) was the region of several imperial silver mines. Equally, pine wood was one of the main sources for the production of tar used for various purposes. See F. BULIĆ, *Melita (Mljet, Meleda)*, in *Bullettino di archeologia e storia dalmata* XL-XLII, Split, 1922, pp. 107-109; R. J. FORBES, *Studies in ancient technology*, Volume 2, Brill, Leiden, 1964, pp. 22-26; B. GUŠIĆ, *Nacionalni park Mljet*, in *Otok Mljet ...*, pp. 29-31.

¹⁶ K. PRIJATELJ, *Kasnoantikna palača u Polačama na otoku Mljetu*, in *Arhitektura* 25-27, Zagreb, 1949, pp. 89-93.

¹⁷ LJ. KARAMAN, *O rimskom zaseoku na otoku Mljetu*, in *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku* LVI-LIX/1954-1957, pp. 102-107.

¹⁸ Some of Karaman's observations and arguments appear to be completely correct. Namely those related to the building technique used in Polače. See LJ. KARAMAN, *Razgovori o nekim problemima domaće historije, arheologije i historije umjetnosti II*, in *Peristil* 5, Zagreb, 1962, pp. 126-127.

¹⁹ E. DYGGVE, *Palača na otoku Mljetu s novog gledišta*, in *Zbornik za umetnosno zgodovino* V/VI, Ljubljana, 1959, pp. 79-90.

²⁰ However, his preconceptions should not be judged so harshly as Noël Duval did, who in turn limited his own possibilities of deduction by relying on just one possible method. In fact, Dyggve's reconstruction of the "palace" in Polače, although it contained obvious mistakes, is the only real and published attempt to depict the actual outlines of the edifice. Deconstruction of the dialogue about the late antique palatial architecture, seen primarily from the archaeological standpoint, surely did not improve our insight into the phenomenon. On the other hand, Dyggve's *croquis*es and, sometimes faulty, interpretations were constructive efforts and stimulated further discussion. His interpretations, we believe, should be judged from the perspective of the present state of research, which made a significant advance from his time. In all, Karaman's arguments against Dyggve's conclusions appear to be much more convincing and constructive (40 years earlier) than Duval's. N. DUVAL, *Hommage à Ejnar et Ingrid Dyggve. La théorie du palais du Bas-Empire et les fouilles de Thessalonique*, in *Antiquité tardive* 11-2003, Brepols, 2003, pp. 273-300; LJ. KARAMAN, *Razgovori o nekim problemima...*, pp. 126-127.

²¹ The results of the recent architectural survey have been published in 2002. The layout of the building was corrected and some of Dyggve's mistakes became obvious. For example, it showed that the plan of the building was not symmetrical, as Dyggve had imagined. Lateral room on the eastern side of the hall appears to have been much smaller than the one on the western side, so the assumption that the building was cross shaped appears to be wrong. See J. STOŠIĆ, I. TENŠEK, I. VALJATO-VRUS, I. ŽILE, op. cit., pp. 98-105.

²² Actually, the document depicts the protocol by which Pierius' agents would take a possession over the estates donated to *comes*. See T. HODG-KIN, *Italy and her invaders*, Volume 1, Clarendon Press, London, 1885.

²³ Actually, de Azevedo referred to the palace in Polače a couple of times. See M. CAGIANO DE AZEVEDO, *Ville rustiche tardoantiche e installazioni agricole altomedievali*, in *XIII Settimana internazionale di studi del Centro di studi sull'altomedioevo*, Spoleto, 1965, p. 669 and M. CAGIANO DE AZEVEDO, *Il Palatium di porto Palazzo a Meleda*, in *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul tema: Tardo antico e alto Medioevo, La forma artistica nel passaggio dell'antichità al medioevo*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome, 1968.

²⁴ First of all, Nikolajević pointed out that de Azevedo's interpretation of the Ravenna document had many flaws. See I. NIKOLAJEVIĆ, *Veliki posed u Dalmaciji u V i VI veku u svetlosti arheoloških nalaza*, in *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 13, Beograd, 1971, pp. 284-292.

²⁵ The document in question is a testament that was composed (maybe) around the middle of the 6th century by an anonymous proprietor of the estate on Mljet. The document was first published by Marini in 1805 and was further examined by Nikolajević. It tells us that the island functioned as a coherent estate till the middle of the 6th century. It was owned or leased by a wealthy proprietor whose possessions included some other estates and not just Mljet. The estate could still raise an equal amount of money as in Pierius' time. These information correspond to the historical context of the first half of the 6th century when the island was first in Ostrogothic and then in Byzantine possession. In the first decades of the 6th century the island could have indeed been given to some of the Ostrogothic governors of Dalmatia and Savia. It was most surely still frequented by *tribuni maritimi*, as the administrative system in Dalmatia did not crumble under the Ostrogothic rule. With Justinian's reconquest Mljet was included in the so-called "limes maritimus", i. e. the chain of fortresses that protected the maritime highway along the eastern Adriatic coast, leading to the major centers in the Northern Adriatic, as well as to the centers on the western shores of the Apennine peninsula. Archaeological exploration on the island of Mljet has shown that the fortress overlooking the Polače bay was not the only one on the island. On a small island situated in the lake on the southern side of Mljet, remains of a small fortress were uncovered. It was dated to the 6th century. Such a dating opens the question of the dating of the one above Polače for which there is no evidence that it was built simultaneously with the palace. Byzantine fortification on the southern side of the island could be, on the other hand, treated as an argument that the strengthening of the island defenses happened all around the island simultaneously – in the 6th century. The text of the testament could be found in G. MARINI, *I papiri diplomatici*, Rome, 1805, No. 78 and I. NIKOLAJEVIĆ, op. cit., pp. 284-292. For the position of Mljet in the Adriatic "limes maritimus" see the extensive study of this issue I. GOLDSTEIN, *Bizant na Jadrani*, Latina et Graeca, Zagreb, 1992, pp. 38-41 and *Idem*, *Funkcija Jadrana u ratu Bizantskog carstva protiv Ostrogota 535-555. godine*, in *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 37, Zagreb, 2005, pp. 23-34. See also Ž. PEKOVIĆ, op. cit., pp. 463-466.

²⁶ See below.

²⁷ In any case, it is pretty sure that Pierius never visited Mljet or his estates on Sicily. Pierius was Odoacer's *comes domesticorum* from 488 till 490 AD, so it is most likely that the first donation (that of the *massa Pyramitana* and Mljet) happened sometime in 488. The document from 489

AD also contains the description of the procedure that happened with Sicilian estates after they were donated to Pierius. So, we know that the estates were actually visited by Pierius' *actores* and not himself. After all, his position as *comes domesticorum* surely did not leave him much time to be absent from the court.

²⁸ I. FISKOVIĆ, *Jesu li Polače na Mljetu bile sijelo vladara Dalmacije?*, in *Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu*, vol. 13-14/1996-1997, Zagreb, 1999, pp. 61-82.

²⁹ I. Fisković raised a number of questions related to the "palace" in Polače and was the first who offered a comprehensive argumentation of several aspects of the "palace". This article, as well as the lecture held in the fall 2010 in Pomena, represent an effort to continue the research of prof. I. Fisković to whom I am grateful for giving me an incentive to proceed with the research of the "palace".

³⁰ V. BEGOVIĆ-DVORŽAK, *Plovni put prema Neretvi i Naroni – kasnoantički lokaliteti na otoku Mljetu*, in *Arheološka istraživanja u Naroni i dolini Neretve*, Izdanja HAD-a 22, Zagreb-Metković-Split, 2003, pp. 289-304.

³¹ It is based on the opinion of I. Matejčić and was repeated and presented as a fact by Y. A. Marano in one of the latest publications dealing with late antique housing. See Y. A. MARANO, *Domus in qua manebat episcopus: episcopal residences in northern Italy during Late Antiquity (4th to 6th centuries AD)*, in *Housing in late antiquity: from palaces to shops*, L. LAVAN, L. ÖZGENEL, A. C. SARANTIS (eds.), Brill, Leiden, 2007, pp. 97-129; I. MATEJČIĆ, *Episcopio della Eufrosiana di Parenzo*, in *Bulletin de l'Association pour l'Antiquité Tardive* 11, 2002, pp. 67-72.

³² One has to be aware of the main features of the architecture of the episcopal palaces in the 5th and 6th century. The most significant was the transferral of the reception space onto the first floor. B. POLCI, *Some aspects of the transformation of the Roman domus between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages*, in *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology*, L. LAVAN, W. BOWDEN (eds.), Brill, Leiden, 2003, pp. 79-112; C. SFAMENI, *Ville residenziali nell'Italia tardoantica*, Edipuglia, Bari, 2006, pp. 215-243.

³³ See below.

³⁴ This is not surprising considering that there were no systematic archaeological explorations of the site. In the early 1970's a team from the Office for the protection of the cultural monuments in Dubrovnik under the leadership of D. Beritić conducted a research around one of the church complexes. At the same time (1970-1971 and 1975) Zdenko Brusić carried out the exploration of Polače bay aquatorium which yielded with some very indicative finds. Underwater research of the Mljet's aquatorium is still being carried out, but the complex in the bay still awaits future exploration. See Z. BRUŠIĆ, *Antička luka u Polačama na otoku Mljetu*, in *Izdanja HAD-a* 12, Zagreb, 1988, pp. 139-151; I. MIHOLJEK, *Mljet – uvala V. Dolina i pličina Preč*, in *Hrvatski arheološki godišnjak* 4/2007, Zagreb, 2008, pp. 575-577.

³⁵ We believe that this is the crucial point. A building of the size and elaboration that we find on Mljet is undoubtedly a product of a broad economic base of its owner. In the geographical context of the eastern Adriatic coast it is exceptional in almost every way. Furthermore, it is odd that it was situated on an island with a relatively modest agricultural potential. On the other hand, there are many parts of the Dalmatian coastal region whose economic (primarily agricultural) potential was much higher, but no such building was ever built in these parts. So, the real question is when the island was most profitable and important. The main building is obviously a statement of somebody's power. But, whose? And for whom was the message intended for? When was this message important? Who had the means and who could have been interested in building such a palace? If we consider the hypotheses formulated till now we are confronted with an unusual enigma. Why would any possible proprietor of the estate want to build such a luxurious and sizable structure on an estate from which he was, according to the researchers, absent for most of the time? If the building was indeed a statement of power of a proprietor, would he not rather choose his central estate to demonstrate it? As we said, there is no match for this building in Dalmatia (except the imperial palace in Split). Lastly, if we accept the offered interpretation that the palace was built to be a tranquil retiring place for a wealthy Dalmatian, the question remains why he had chosen one of the most frequented bays in southern Dalmatia? According to the finds in the aquatorium of the bay, he did not enjoy a lot of piece in Polače bay.

³⁶ V. POSAVEC, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-67; P. MACGEORGE, *Late Roman warlords*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 15-68.

³⁷ We have another similar case which could illustrate this claim. Although some researchers have considered the possibility that the Diocletian's palace was used by Marcellinus, there are no arguments at all that could support this claim, or support the assumption that it was used by Glicerius. The only resident of the palace for whom it is sure that he used it as a residence was Julius Nepos. It should not be forgotten that at the time he resided in the palace he was still recognized by the Eastern emperor as his Western counterpart. So, it is quite obvious why he had the right to use the imperial property, unlike Marcellinus and Glicerius. The mistake of not distinguishing the state's from imperial or emperor's property has been made quite often in the case of Diocletian's palace. If it was imperial it was at disposal of imperial officials and administrators and not civil or military ones. The same could be concluded in the case of Mljet if it was indeed an imperial property, as the researchers claim, although no arguments have yet been submitted. See LJ. KARAMAN, *Događaji petog stoljeća u splitskoj Dioklecijanovoj palači*, in *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 14/1962, Split, pp. 5-11; V. POSAVEC, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67 and 135.

³⁸ Story of the profanation of Diocletian's tomb was recorded by Ammianus Marcellinus. Lately, J. Belamarić pointed out that the hypothesis that the profanator of the tomb was an official (*palatinus* or *praefectianus*), and not a slave, as it was thought, is more credible. Thus, the story vividly shows what happened when the imperial property was violated, even if it was violated by an imperial official, as was most likely the case with the profanator Danus. See J. BELAMARIĆ, *Dioklecijanova palača – razmatranja o okolnostima utemeljenja i izvornoj funkciji*, PhD thesis, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb, 2008, p. 126.

³⁹ However, this is extremely unlikely. See below the argumentation about the function of the palace in Polače.

⁴⁰ P. MACGEORGE, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-45.

⁴¹ V. POSAVEC, *op. cit.*, pp. 55 and 64; J. J. WILKES, *op. cit.*, p. 420, etc.

⁴² P. MACGEORGE, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

⁴³ E. Dyggve has already noticed the peculiarities of the technique. It looks like a kind of *opus vittatum mixtum* in which the bricks were substituted by thin stone slabs which were obviously more available on the island than bricks. This makes it most unusual in the Dalmatian surrounding. As Karaman pointed out, this technique cannot be found in Dalmatian Christian architecture of the 5th or 6th century. However, it could be easily compared with the techniques used on ancient buildings. According to Karaman, even Dyggve recognized this fact at first, but he then changed his opinion because of other features of the building. See E. DYGGVE, *Palača na otoku Mljetu s novog gledišta*, in *Ejnar Dyggve. Izabrani spisi*, N. CAMBI, T. MARASOVIĆ (eds.), Književni krug, Split, 1989, p. 168; LJ. KARAMAN, *Razgovori o nekim problemima...*, pp. 126-127; A. KILIĆ-MATIĆ, *Prilog proučavanju tehnika i struktura gradnje rimskih vila rustika na obali rimske provincije Dalmacije*, in *Opuscula Archaeologica* 28, No. 1, Zagreb, 2004, pp. 91-109.

⁴⁴ The only exception is a later interpolation between the western tower and one of the lateral rooms.

⁴⁵ The eastern one was built in an irregular *opus incertum* which could indicate that the building was a later addition to the complex.

⁴⁶ The bibliography on the subject is pretty extensive. We will point here to some of the most relevant ones related to the subject of the article. G. RIPOLL, J. ARCE, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-114.; T. LEWIT, "Vanishing villas": what happened to elite rural habitation in the West in the 5th-6th c?, in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 16, 2003, pp. 260-274; A. CHAVARRIA ARNAU, *Interpreting the Transformation of Late Roman Villa: The Case of Hispania*,

in *Landscapes of change: rural evolutions in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages*, N. CHRISTIE (ed.), Ashgate Publishing, 2004, pp. 67-102, C. SFAMENI, *Residential villas in late antique Italy: continuity and change*, in *Recent research on the late antique countryside*, W. BOWDEN, L. LAVAN, C. MACHADO (eds.), Brill, Leiden, 2004, pp. 335-376, C. SFAMENI, *Ville residenziali nell'Italia tardoantica*, Edipuglia, Bari, 2006; L. MULVIN, *Late Roman villas...* These could be complemented by many other studies of G. P. Brogiolo, J. Arce, A. Chavarria Arnau, S. P. Ellis and others.

⁴⁷ J. J. WILKES, *op. cit.*, pp. 417-418.

⁴⁸ About the case of the building in Ostrvica, which has been often associated with Polače, see below.

⁴⁹ D. MAUSKOPF DELIYANNIS, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

⁵⁰ Nor did it have a polygonal apse A. AUGENTI, *The palace of Theodoric at Ravenna: A new analysis of the complex*, in *Housing in late antiquity: from palaces to shops*, L. LAVAN, L. OZGENEL, A. C. SARANTIS (eds.), Brill, Leiden, 2007, pp. 425-453.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 436.

⁵² Actually, the openings on the palace in Polače are the product of conservation experts who had to stop further devastation of the walls. They could have been actually somewhat lower.

⁵³ The term is borrowed from J.-P. Sodini, although it was used by several authors, including E. Dyggve. J.-P. SODINI, *Archaeology and the late antique social structures*, in *Theory and practice in late antique archaeology*, L. LAVAN, W. BOWDEN (eds.), Brill, Leiden, 2003, p. 30.

⁵⁴ S. SCOTT, *Elites, Exhibitionism and Society of the Late Roman Villa*, in *Landscapes of change: rural evolutions in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages*, N. CHRISTIE (ed.), Ashgate Publishing, 2004, pp. 39-65.

⁵⁵ The measurements were taken from L. MULVIN, *Late Roman villas ...*, Tables 5-7.

⁵⁶ To stress further the importance of dimensions of the aula on Mljet, which were of "imperial" dimensions, let us see what L. Mulvin writes about this topic: "Certainly, large scale halls and separate dining areas are found in many of the villas in the Danube-Balkan area, not just in the imperial palaces, but also in the large to medium and smaller villas. At the imperial level the larger size reception rooms would have accommodated the appropriate grandeur of scale of imperial assemblies. The palace halls are vast, demonstrating the power of the emperor. Constantine's apsidal hall at Mediana is 26.5 m, the apsidal hall of Diocletian's palace at Split is 41 m long, and Gamzigrad has two apsidal halls at 15 m and 17 m. Other large scale villas in the region such as Keszthely-Fenékpuszta and Hoszszúhetény, Hungary have apsidal halls measuring 21 m and 26.5 m in length respectively. Combinations of these forms are also found in the urban administrative palaces such as at Gorsium. Several examples of villas survive where an apse was added to a rectangular dining hall or *triclinium* to create an apsidal dining hall. A good example may be seen at Balácapusztá in the third century."; L. MULVIN, *Late Roman Villas in the Danube Balkan Region and the Evidence for the Development of Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, Zalai Múzeum, 2002, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Entrances to the gallery can still be seen on the first floor, which could only be reached by the stairways situated in the space between the towers and the main body of the building. Although the eastern tower was not preserved we can assume that the galleys had entrances on both sides. About this see E. DYGGVE, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁵⁸ K. M. SWOBODA, *Römische und romanische Paläste*, H. Böhlau Nachf., Vienna, 1969; K. M. SWOBODA, *The Problem of the Iconography of Late Antique and Early Mediaeval Palaces*, in *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1961, pp. 78-89; E. B. SMITH, *Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages*, Princeton University Press, 1956; S. ČURČIĆ, *Late-Antique Palaces: The Meaning of Urban Context*, in *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 23, 1993, pp. 67-90.

⁵⁹ We could name a number of examples, but let us just mention a few of the earliest. Coins struck in Augusta Emerita, a colony formed by the intervention of Augustus, commemorate the full civic emancipation of the community and its relation to the imperial government by displaying the same motif on the reverse. Let us then mention the building of monumental gateway of Salona, with two octagonal towers carrying the dedication inscription naming Augustus as a dedicatory. Again we can identify the motif as a clear sign of a close relationship between the town elevated to the status of colony and the Augustus as an imperial benefactor.

⁶⁰ A. MARZANO, *Roman villas in central Italy: a social and economic history*, Brill, Leiden, 2007, pp. 22-25.

⁶¹ Dyson writes: "The towers and their polygonal facings mimic the impressive middle republican wall systems of the Roman colony at nearby Cosa. That architectural monumentality expressed the ideology of personal power and prestige of the villa owner, the "hegemonic architecture" that has been associated with the world of the Palladian villa owners.' It also created a sense of identification with the world and values of the earlier republic as expressed in the fortifications of the colony. A similar wall and tower system is found at two other villas in the Ager Cosanus, and they appear to be distinct to that region. Indeed, the turreted façade may be the "signature" of an architect working for the late republican elite in the area."; S. L. DYSON, *The Excavations at Le Colonne and the Villa Culture of the Ager Cosanus*, in *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, Vol. 47, 2002, p. 212.

⁶² L. MULVIN, *Late Roman villas ...*, p. 51.

⁶³ Mócsy thought that the villa in Parndorf became the imperial property already in Decius' time. It was also suggested that it was the meeting place of tetrarchs in 308 AD. Also, there is a possibility that emperor Valentinian I spent some time either in the villa or in its vicinity. See A. MOCSY, *op. cit.*, pp. 244 and 295.

⁶⁴ Parndorf, as the earliest building with this specific kind of facade in the region, clearly influenced some of the later buildings. One of them was the main building at Kövágászölös which was, as in Parndorf, just a part of a *Streuhof* complex. Building was dated to the 3rd century. Then there is one of the northern buildings with identical two semi-circular projections in the most impressive Keszthely-Fenékpuszta, as well as the so-called Basilica just to the south of the previously mentioned building. Both were surrounded by a huge perimeter wall similar to those in Gamzigrad, Sagvar-Tricciana and Alsóheténypuszta. Finally, there is a Dalmatian example of a building with the identical facade, at Strupnić in the hinterland of Salona, probably built in the first half of the 4th century. None of these buildings had any need of defense, considering that they were either protected by the strong fortifications of the whole complexes, or they were situated in safe zones. See L. MULVIN, *op. cit.*; E. B. THOMAS, *Villa settlements*, in *The archaeology of Roman Pannonia*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1980, pp. 275-321; T. TURKOVIĆ, M. ZEMAN, *Prilog poznavanju kasnoantičkih vila s područja provincije Dalmacije – slučaj vile u Strupniću kraj Livna*, in *Ars Adriatica*, Vol. 1, Zadar, 2011 (in print).

⁶⁵ E. B. Thomas had a different opinion about the reasons why the towers appear on a number of villas in Pannonia at the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 4th century, and about their function. Thomas attributed their introduction into the late antique architecture in Pannonia to the influence of the northern type of villa with side projections (*Porticus Villa mit Eckrisaliten*) and to the tetrarchic programme of fortification of the northern limes. See E. B. THOMAS, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-321 and L. MULVIN, *Late Roman Villa Plans...*, pp. 377-412.

⁶⁶ L. MULVIN, *Late Roman Villa Plans...*, p. 405.

⁶⁷ It has been noticed that there are several anomalies in the palace's fortification system, starting with the exterior entrances to the towers, to the unusually large exterior arched openings at the level of the first floor, which were altogether unsuitable for defense. Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that the palace's fortifications were primarily a symbolical representation of an idea than the actual defensive system. S. PIPLOVIĆ,

Obilježja i paradoksi Dioklecijanove palače u Splitu, in *Kulturna baština* 20/28-29, Split, 1997, pp. 7-9; J. BELAMARIĆ, *Dioklecijanova palača – razmatranja ...*, pp. 68-69.

⁶⁸ D. SREJOVIĆ, M. TOMOVIĆ, Č. VASIĆ, *Šarkamen, Tetrarchial Imperial Palace*, in *Starinar*, No. 47, 1996, pp. 231-243; M. VASIĆ, M. TOMOVIĆ, *Šarkamen (East Serbia): An Imperial Residence and Memorial Complex of the Tetrarchic Period*, in *Germania* 83, 2005, pp. 257-307.

⁶⁹ Just as has been put by G. Nikšić in G. NIKŠIĆ, *Dioklecijanova palača – od projekta do izvedbe (Diocletian's palace – from design to execution)*, in *Dioklecijan, tetrarhija i Dioklecijanova palača – o 1700. obljetnici postojanja (Diocletian, Tetrarchy and Diocletian's palace - on the 1700th anniversary of existence)*, N. CAMBI, J. BELAMARIĆ, T. MARASOVIĆ (eds.), Književni krug, Split, 2009, pp. 124-125.

⁷⁰ This concept, I believe, was already examined and explained by S. Čurčić.

⁷¹ P. SARRIS, *Rehabilitating the Great Estate: Aristocratic property and Economic Growth in the Late Antique West*, in *Recent research on the late antique countryside*, op. cit., pp. 55-72.

⁷² Discussing the meaning and connotations of the term *palatium*, Millar convincingly explained the nature of the stopping places of the imperial entourage. Quoting Cassius Dio and pointing to the several examples of *palatia*, used as stopping places for the Emperor, he has shown that the imperial entourage, when travelling, relied on a network of villas and palaces which were at their disposal. Villa in Parndorf, or the one in Mediana, perfectly fits this profile, just like the one on Mljet. See F. MILLAR, op. cit., pp. 41-53.

⁷³ A. SMALL, R. J. BUCK, *The Excavations of San Giovanni Di Ruoti: The villas and their environment*, Vol. 1, University of Toronto Press, 1994., p. 42; C. SFAMENI, *Ville residenziali...*, pp. 214-229.

⁷⁴ See below.

⁷⁵ J. THOMAS SMITH, op. cit., pp. 178-183.

⁷⁶ S. RASCON MARQUES, A. MENDEZ MADARIAGA, A. L. SANCHEZ MONTES, *El mosaico del Auriga de la villa romana de El Val (Alcala de Henares, Madrid) y las carreras de carros en entorno complutense*, in *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie I, Prehist. Y Arqueol.*, t. 6, 1993, pp. 303-342; A. MENDEZ MADARIAGA, S. RASCON MARQUES, *La villa romana de El Val (Alcalá de Henares)*, in *Revista de Arqueología* 101, Madrid, 1989, pp. 50-58.

⁷⁷ Z. BRUSIĆ, op. cit., pp. 139-151; A. KISIĆ, *Podmorski nalaz kasnoantičkih svjetiljki u uvali Polače na Mljetu*, in *Anali Centra za znanstveni rad JAZU u Dubrovniku XV-XVI*, Dubrovnik, 1978, pp. 7-16.

⁷⁸ The case of lateral rooms is very interesting. It seems that, according to the results of an architectural survey made by Stošić and his team, that two eastern rooms had barrel vaulting and were connected with the third one, forming a single block. Thus, it appears that the hall was, on the eastern side, flanked by a sequence of three rooms, significantly lower than were some on the western side. On the opposite side, there are again three rooms, but one of them, the northern one, seems to have been much higher than the others. However, unlike most of the other rooms on both sides, it did not have exits to the outside of the building. The height of this room mislead Dyggve to imagine the transept. See J. STOŠIĆ et al, op. cit., pp. 98-105.

⁷⁹ No hypocaust system was recorded underneath the mosaic found in the building. Thus, the assumption, made according to the shape of the building, that it served as *triclinium*, seems more likely.

⁸⁰ J. ARCE, *Otium et negotium: the great estates, 4th to 7th century*, in *The transformation of the Roman world AD 400-900*, L. WEBSTER, M. BROWN (eds.), University of California Press, 1997, pp. 19-32.

⁸¹ Although she used the older plan made by Dyggve, which proved to be wrong in several details.

⁸² H. VON PETRIKOVITS, *Fortifications in the North-Western Roman Empire from the Third to the Fifth Centuries AD*, in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 61, 1971, pp. 178-218; S. JOHNSON, *Late Roman Fortifications*, London, 1983; M. REDDE, *Dioclétien et les fortifications militaires de l'antiquité tardive. Quelques considérations de méthode*, in *Antiquité Tardive* 3, Brepols, 1995, pp. 91-124.

⁸³ Towers of the *Romuliana* had various number of sides. Corner towers had 16 sides while the others had 10 or 12.

⁸⁴ It should be also noted that the combining of the dodecagonal and round was obviously one of the important traits of the *Romuliana* builders. Dodecagonal shape was again repeated on the exterior of the Mausoleum 2 which had a simple round *cella*. Again, dodecagonal shape makes the Mausoleum 2 an exception among the late antique imperial mausolea. See M. J. JOHNSON, *The Roman Imperial Mausoleum in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2009; D. SREJOVIĆ, Č. VASIĆ, *Emperor Galerius's buildings in Romuliana (Gamzigrad, Eastern Serbia)*, in *Antiquité Tardive* 2, Brepols, 1994, pp. 123-141.

⁸⁵ Bidwell and Hartley have pointed out that these towers were an anomaly in Roman Britain. Although there were other 4th century polygonal towers in Britain, most of them had lesser number of fronts and were of a much simpler shape (heptagonal, semi-octagonal, etc.). See P. BIDWELL, E. HARTLEY, S. CORCORAN, *Constantine at York*, in *Niš & Vizantija VII*, Niš, 2009, p. 51; J. S. WACHER, *The towns of Roman Britain*, University of California Press, 1975.

⁸⁶ P. BIDWELL, E. HARTLEY, S. CORCORAN, op. cit., pp. 45-54.

⁸⁷ Obviously there were not enough tiles around the building site on Mljet for builders to use. So, they improvised and relied on the local stone, which was cut in thin strips in imitation of bricks, in order to maintain the usual building practice of the workshop. Furthermore, craftsmen have indeed tried to incorporate bricks as many as they had at their disposal. But, as Dyggve noticed, bricks in the Polače walls are of a poor kind and not very durable, which surely deterred builders from using them in a more significant number.

⁸⁸ It reads: "Pro salute/C Balbinian/i templum cu/m portico ad/amplavit M/agnus vilic/us Libero Pat/libes fecit". See M. ZANINOVIĆ, *Liberov hram u Polačama na otoku Mljetu*, in *Od Helena do Hrvata*, F. MIROŠEVIĆ (ed.), Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 1996, pp. 345-351.

⁸⁹ About *Publius Coelius Balbinus Vibullius Pius* see R. SYME, *Review of the book of Adolf Jagenteufel, Die Statthalter der römischen Provinz Dalmatien von Augustus bis Diokletian*, in *Gnomon* 31. Bd., H. 6, 1959, pp. 510-518; J. J. WILKES, op. cit., p. 320; G. ALFÖLDY, *Bevölkerung und gesellschaft der römische provinz Dalmatien*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1969, pp. 109, 113 and 120; A. JAGENTEUFEL, *Die Statthalter der römischen Provinz Dalmatien von Augustus bis Diokletian*, Vienna, Rohrer in Komm, 1959.

⁹⁰ About the subject see the comprehensive study by J. CARLSEN, *Vilici and Roman estate managers until AD 284*, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1995.

⁹¹ Although we know of a similar rare case in the judicial convent of Naron, on account of which we could assume that southern Dalmatia in the 2nd and 3rd century was a wealthy and advanced part of the Roman world, probably because of the intensive trade conducted in the region. We know of the case of the Modestus, slave of the senator M. Lusius Severus, resident of Naron and the patron of the colony, who enlarged the temple of the same deity for the well being of his master. See M. GLAVIČIĆ, *Naronski magistrati i drugi gradski uglednici*, in *Arheološka istraživanja u Naroni i dolini Neretve*, op. cit., pp. 224-225.

⁹² As G. C. Marrone explains, Augustus' war against piracy had an ideological as well as legal background. It was preceded by a series of actions against pirates in the Mediterranean sea backed up by *Lex de piratis* from the year 100. B.C., and the controversial *Lex Gabinia de piratis* from the 67 B.C. Augustus even enlisted his achievements against pirates in *Res Gestae*. See G. CRESCI MARRONE, *Ecumene Augustea: una politica per*

il consenso, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1993, pp. 94-96; D. BRAUND, *Piracy under the principate and the ideology of imperial eradication*, in *War and Society in the Roman world*, J. RICH, G. SHIPLEY (eds.), Routledge, 1995, pp. 195-212; M. ŠAŠEL KOS, *Appian and Illyricum*, Narodni muzej Slovenije, Ljubljana, 2005, p. 67.

⁹³ Such a severe punishment attracted the attention of Croatian researchers who have noticed that for the same crime Liburnians were punished only with the confiscation of their ships, which will later on play a role in a battle of *Actium*. So, the question of Augustus' intentions should be raised. The obvious explanation is that the two islands were made a state (and later imperial) property because of their strategic importance, as they stood immediately on the maritime highway that connected the Apennine peninsula with the eastern Adriatic coast, and namely Epirus and Greece. It could be speculated that Augustus and Agrippa were organizing the staging ground for the future events that involved precisely these parts of the Adriatic coast.

⁹⁴ About the subject see P. A. BRUNT, *The "Fiscus" and Its Development*, in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 56, Parts 1 and 2, 1966, pp. 75-91; A. H. M. JONES, *The Aerarium and the Fiscus*, in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 40, Parts 1 and 2, 1950, pp. 22-29; F. MILLAR, *The Fiscus in the First Two Centuries*, in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 53, Parts 1 and 2, 1963, pp. 29-42; C. H. V. SUTHERLAND, *Aerarium and Fiscus during the Early Empire*, in *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 66, No. 2, 1945, pp. 151-170, etc.

⁹⁵ We know nothing about the *portorium* stations south of Salona. De Laet's study of *portorium* stations on the eastern Adriatic coast finishes with Salona and even there the evidence for the existence of a *portorium* office is weak. But, although there are no archaeological confirmations of the existence of the offices south of Senia, they must have existed in southern Dalmatia. Judging by the underwater finds, the usual and natural maritime routs through Adriatic, importance of certain routes, material finds on shore and the availability of safe harbors in southern Dalmatia, it could be assumed that some of the places were likely candidates to be *portorium* stations. Polače bay qualifies in almost every aspect.

⁹⁶ Z. BRUSIĆ, *Antička luka u Polačama na otoku Mljetu*, in *Izdanja HAD-a* 12/1987, Zagreb, 1988, pp. 139-150.

⁹⁷ Brusić reported that most of the finds in Polače bay were from the 4th and 5th century, although the harbors were used, judging by the finds, from the 2nd till the 7th century. However, in the first campaigns some 400 coins were found, the majority of which can be dated to the 4th century (time of Constantine or Constantius). Z. BRUSIĆ, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-150.

⁹⁸ J. J. WILKES, *The Illyrians*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1995, pp. 210-211.

⁹⁹ M. C. D'ERCOLE, *Itinerari e scambi nell'Adriatico preromano (VIII-V sec. a. C.)*, in *Les routes de l'Adriatique antique. Geographie et Economie*, Actes de la Table ronde 18 au 22 septembre 2001 (Zadar), S. ČAČE, A. KURILIĆ, F. TASSAUX (eds.), Bordeaux-Zadar, 2006, pp. 91-105; M. KOZLIČIĆ, M. BRATANIĆ, *Ancient Sailing Routes in Adriatic*, in *Les routes de l'Adriatique antique*, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-118.

¹⁰⁰ A. KISIĆ, *Antički brod u podmorju Mljeta (A shipwreck near the island of Mljet in the antiquity)*, Dubrovački muzeji, Split, 2000.

¹⁰¹ About the St. Paul's voyage and the location of the shipwreck see A. NIČETIĆ, *O nekim navigacijskim aspektima plovidbe svetog Pavla od Krete do Melite*, in *Anali Dubrovnik* 38, Dubrovnik, 2000, pp. 305-307.

¹⁰² Unfortunately, de Laet's study on *portorium* could not include *portorium* stations south of Salona, as they were not epigraphically attested, although they must have existed by definition.

¹⁰³ Ones like *Publius Coelius Balbinus*, who perfectly fits the profile of the *conductor* of the estate on Mljet and the *conductor* of the *portorium* which was collated on the island. He had imperial connections through his father and obviously had enough capital to guarantee for the lease.

¹⁰⁴ In a matter of fact, the changes of the way the *portorium* was farmed were initiated exactly in the Illyricum. Most of the authors attribute the change to the time of Marcus Aurelius, but it is obviously still unclear in what degree the procuratorial elite have actually taken over the tax farming in the Illyricum by the end of the 2nd century.

¹⁰⁵ S. J. DE LAET, *op. cit.*, pp. 403-415; P. A. BRUNT, *Procuratorial Jurisdiction*, in *Roman imperial themes*, P. A. BRUNT (ed.), Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 170-171.

¹⁰⁶ Mljet was surrounded on all sides by imperial properties by Constantine's time. Significant portion of Praevalitana was imperial. Northeastern part of Dalmatia with its mines was also an imperial property. Moesia Prima, Dacia Ripensis and Dardania were mostly imperial property, as well as some parts of Dacia Mediterranea. See M. MIRKOVIĆ, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-75.

¹⁰⁷ Millar offered an interesting argumentation of the term and the process of multiplication of imperial palaces. He pointed out that some of the palaces, used for temporary accommodation of the Emperor and his entourage, were situated in quite remote places, such were Arsinoe or Hermopolis in Egypt. Some of these palaces were, as Cassius Dio wrote, even erected by Caracalla for his accommodation in places which he was never likely to visit. With its formal features as well as by its position the "palace" in Polače could have been one of such *comitati*. See F. MILLAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-53.

¹⁰⁸ There is one further similarity between *Romuliana* and the palace in Polače. Several researchers of the palace in Polače had an opinion that it was never finished. This hypothesis was a product of several misconceptions – that the palace was built by Pierius, whose premature death brought about the abortion of works in Polače bay, the fact that no architectural decoration related to this spacious building was ever found, etc. But, nowadays we are sure that Pierius was not the one who commissioned the building. On the other hand, the fact that not a piece of decoration was found on the site (of the main building), or that there is not one which can be linked with it, could mean that the palace was indeed left unfinished. At the same time the possibility that it was thoroughly plundered and stripped of all of its decoration should not be excluded. In the case that it was indeed not finished, that fact could recall the way in which the works on *Romuliana*, Šarkamen, or Diocletian's palace were stopped at a certain moment. Still, the engagement of the *Romuliana*'s builders on Mljet could also be interpreted as their new commission which ensued after they were decommissioned in Dacia Ripensis. This could happen only in a decade following the death of Galerius (311 AD). But, it is even more probable that the order for the building came from Licinius, who took over the three dioceses which were formerly subjected to the Galerius' rule. In fact, a premature abortion of the works on the palace could be easily explained by the fact that by 317 AD, Licinius actually lost control over significant part of his domains (Dioceses of Pannonia and Moesia – thus including Dalmatia), which were taken over by Constantine as a reparation for the damage inflicted by Licinius in 316 AD. From the time of Galerius' death to 316 AD Licinius had every means as well as the cause for building of such a palace in a style created by the late emperor Galerius, whose imperial authority gave him the legitimacy as an Augustus, and which he was forced to defend, even with a most severe violence towards Galerius' wife and Diocletian's daughter Valeria, after the death of his imperial benefactor. The events that Lactantius noted, related to the Galerius' property that Valeria claimed as her legacy, show that Licinius indeed had a clear aspiration toward Galerius' estates, which were obviously sizable. But, it is hard to make out from Lactantius' words if these properties were Emperor's or imperial, and this difference is crucial for the interpretation of the story. Anyway, Licinius was the one who had *Romuliana*'s architects and masons at his disposal after Galerius' death and he was the one who was interested in the issue of dominance over Italy, because of which the conflict between him and Constantine started. Mljet, as has been said, was on the major and quickest route from Moesia to Italy. Finally, if we consider Lactantius' words, Licinius was the one who took over the strict taxation regime from Galerius. So, in that respect too, he was the most likely candidate to be interested in an imperial estate whose primary source of income was *portorium*. I am grateful to I. Basić, colleague of mine from University of Zagreb, who gave me a suggestion that the "palace" could have been built for Licinius, consider-

ing the historical circumstances in Dalmatia at the beginning of the 4th century. See C. MATSON ODAHL, *Constantine and the Christian empire*, Routledge, 2004, pp. 143-146; T. D. BARNES, *Constantine and Eusebius*, Harvard University Press, 1981, pp. 63-80; N. CAMBI, *Dioklecijanova žena Prisca i kćerka Valeria*, in *Rad Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti. Razred za društvene znanosti* 42, Zagreb, 2003, pp. 1-18; N. CAMBI, *Laktancije. O smrti progoniteljima (Lucii Caecilii Firmiani Lactantii. De mortibus persecutorum)*, Književni krug, Split, 2005.

¹⁰⁹ P. SKOK, *Pojave vulgarno-latinskog jezika na natpisima rimske provincije Dalmacije*, Djela IAZU, Zagreb, 1915, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ This is just an assumption made because of the similar cases on other parts of Dalmatian coast. See P. ŠIMUNOVIĆ, *Istočnojadranska toponimija*, Logos, Split, 1986.

¹¹¹ *Notitia dignitatum* specifically names one imperial procurator who was stationed in Aspalato, i.e. the Diocletian's palace, as the most likely place. This was the *procurator gynaecii Iovensis Dalmatiae – Aspalato*. In this detail *Notitia dignitatum* are precise about the place where the office of the procurator was located. But, this procurator, in our opinion, was transferred to the palace at the end of the 4th century or the immediate beginning of the 5th century, when the procurator of the same kind of the imperial establishment was moved from Bassianae in Pannonia Secunda, because of Goth settlement to the Salona, where they took over the infrastructure originally used by the imperial manufacture in Salona. For other imperial officials in Dalmatia *Notitia* provides less precise information. In the case of the *Procurator rei privatae per Dalmatiam* there is no geographical specification. But, imagining that his office was somewhere else than in the midst of the imperial *res privata* would be quite unreasonable. So, we believe that his office with its staff was also located in the palace, near the Emperor or at least on the imperial estate for which it was charged. The same can be presumed about the other imperial officials such as the *Praepositus thesaurorum Salonitanorum*, whose presence in the palace could be indicated by the size and form of the storage spaces whose precise function still has not been explained. Furthermore, although some of the imperial officials named in the *Notitia Dignitatum* were called Salonitan, there are several indications that certain equation between the nearby provincial capital and the palace happened during the 5th century, as in writings of Sidonius Appolinaris. In detail about the existence of *gynaecium* in the palace see J. BELAMARIĆ, *The Date of Foundation and Original Function of Diocletian's Palace at Split*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 9, Zagreb-Motovun, 2003, pp. 173-185; *Idem*, *Gynaecium Iovense Dalmatiae-Aspalatho*, in *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 40, Split, 2003-2004, pp. 5-42, etc. See Ž. RAPANIĆ, *Od carske palače do srednjovjekovne općine*, Književni krug, Split, 2007; and I. BASIĆ, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

¹¹² In fact, I. Schrunk has already demonstrated that Diocletian's palace was occupied during the 4th and 5th century by a significant number of inhabitants, who could have been, in her opinion, imperial officials and administrators with their families. Her study of the ceramic finds found in the palace clearly shows that the inhabitants of the Palace were supplied by a variety of fine, as well as ordinary tableware. My own conclusions about the inhabitants of the Palace and its original function, presented in my Ph.D. thesis, further strengthen the assumption that a sizable bureaucratic apparatus was situated in the Palace right from the time of the creation of its main outlines, which might have been complemented later by the imperial apartments. In fact, calculation of the Palace's accommodation capacities clearly shows that it coincided with the number of imperial officials and administrators stationed in the provincial centre. Of course, the capacity could have been even larger since we have little information about the northern part of the Palace. See I. DVORŽAK SCHRUNK, *Dioklecijanova palača od 4. do 7. stoljeća u svjetlu keramičkih nalaza*, in *Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu*, 3.s, XXII, Zagreb, 1989, pp. 91-105; T. TURKOVIĆ, *Prikazi gradova na Peutingerovoj karti i razvoj urbanog pejzaža na području Hrvatske između antike i srednjega vijeka*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Zagreb, 2010, pp. 425-427.

¹¹³ Ž. RAPANIĆ, *Kasnoantička "palača"...*, pp. 149-161.

KASNOANTIČKA "PALAČA" U POLAČAMA - TETRARIJSKO ZDANJE?

— SAŽETAK —

Kasnoantička "palača" u uvali Polače na otoku Mljetu privukla je pozornost mnogih znanstvenika tijekom proteklih stotinu godina, no unatoč tomu na neka od osnovnih pitanja vezanih za ovaj prostrani sklop dosad nisu ponuđeni jednoznačni odgovori. Kako sklop nikada nije bio predmetom sustavnog arheološkog istraživanja zasad ga je moguće podvrgnuti tek formalnoj analizi u nastojanju da se razriješe postojeće dvojbe oko njegove datacije.

Usporedba sa nizom raskošnih kasnoantičkih ladanjskih zdanja sa svih strana rimskoga svijeta, ali i s općim razvojnim pravcima kasnoantičke ladanjske arhitekture, ukazuje da središnja građevina predstavlja izvjesnu rijetkost unutar cjeline kasnoantičke ladanjske arhitekture. Oblik dvaju pročeljnih tornjeva, razmjeri građevine, ali i niz drugih specifičnosti, usko ju vezuje uz tetrarhijske gradnje, a ponajviše uz Galerijevu palaču u Gamzigradu, te Konstantinove dogradnje na utvrdi u Yorku. U tom smislu, u radu su prezentirani rezultati analize koji potvrđuju načelna zapažanja Lj. Karamana do kojih je stigao pri kasnijim promišljanjima datacije građevine, a kojoj je inicijalno bio sklon i E. Dyggve. Karakteristike građevine jasno ju svrstavaju u sam kraj 3. ili početak 4. stoljeća te dokidaju mogućnost da je ona proizvod kasnijeg doba, napose prve polovine 6. stoljeća kao što je to zamišljao

Dyggve. Jednako tako, datacija "palače" u 5. stoljeće, u svijetlu pomnije formalne analize, ali i sagledavanja povijesnih okolnosti u Dalmaciji i na rimskom zapadu tijekom 5. stoljeća, ne nalazi potvrdu pri usporedbi sa zdanjima toga doba.

U radu je načet i niz pitanja vezanih prvenstveno za središnju građevinu sklopa. Ponajprije, to su pitanja ekonomske osnove iz koje je monumentalno zdanje izniklo i karakterizira posjeda na kojem se nalazilo. Iz Apijanovog spomena Augustovog osvajanja Mljeta i Korčule moguće je zaključiti da je otok uistinu postao prvo državnim, a potom i carskim posjedom, te je izvjesno da je takvim ostao do u kasnoantičko doba. Nadalje, moguće je utvrditi i da se otok u pojedinim razdobljima nalazio u najmu bogatih Dalmatinaca. Datacijski okvir proistekao iz formalne analize središnjeg zdanja daje pak naslutiti da se radi o carskoj gradnji tetrarhijskog doba, a kao najizgledniji naručitelj gradnje nameće se Licinije.

Međutim, na niz pitanja nije moguće odgovoriti prije izrade cjelovite arhitektonske snimke središnje građevine i ostalih dijelova sklopa. Postoji niz naznaka da je središnja građevina bila pregrađivana tijekom narednih stoljeća kada su uz nju iznikla i dva kršćanska sklopa. No, pitanje pregradnje i sukcesivnosti nastanka pojedinih dijelova sklopa zahtijevaju daljnja istraživanja.

